**LEARNING CIRCLES
IN LIBRARIES**

Real Opportunities
for Adult Online Education
The White Paper

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IN LIBRARIES**
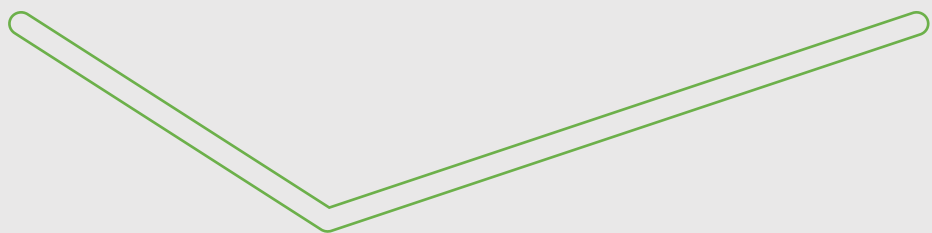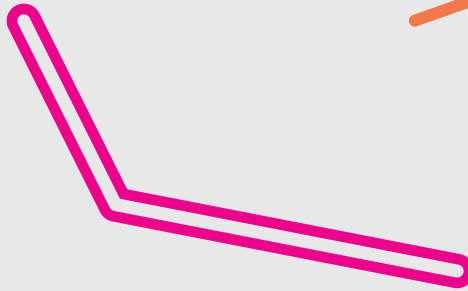
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To the reader

This report presents a general analysis of the status of online learning in Finland, Germany, Poland, Portugal and Romania. The goal of this document is to equip librarians and other educators who work with adults with the knowledge and mindset to guide their audiences through online learning opportunities and empower them to respond to people's various educational needs. The authors envisage that the report will also serve as an inspiration for policy makers, decision makers and local leaders who seek innovative and inclusive ways to make online education more accessible for adults and to use its values for social good.

About us

This White Paper is the outcome of the project Learning Circles in Libraries implemented by the Partnership that has been created within the framework of the Erasmus+ Programme, Key Action: Cooperation for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practices. The Partnership aims at helping adult learners to access useful educational content available online, study effectively and to improve their lifelong learning skills. To achieve this goal the partners will popularise the concept of local Learning Circles in 5 European countries. The Partnership was established by 6 institutions:

- Suomen eOppimiskeskus ry (from Finland);
- Stadtbibliothek Köln (from Germany);
- Fundacja Rozwoju Społeczeństwa Informacyjnego (from Poland);
- Biblioteca Lucio Craveiro da Silva (from Portugal);
- Fundatia Progress (from Romania);
- Peer 2 Peer University (from the United States of America).

How to use the report?

The report discusses three perspectives on adult learning – in particular on online adult learning in Europe: individual perspective, institutional perspective and political perspective, and attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Individual perspective:

- What motivates people to learn?
- What are the main barriers to online learning?
- What aspects of learning experience design are the most effective?

2. Institutional perspective:

- What is the role of formal, non-formal and informal learning in Finland, Germany, Poland,

Portugal and Romania?

- Who are the main stakeholders providing online educational content?
- What are the educational strategies employed by the policy makers?

3. Political perspective:

- What level of importance does adult learning and online learning have on the political agendas of the European Union and its five Member States under scrutiny?

The authors comprised the list of action-oriented conclusions on how to approach adult learning on a local level within the context of the shortcomings and opportunities identified in the above mentioned countries. The reader will also find a glossary of the main concepts used throughout the report at the end of the publication.

INTRODUCTION

BACK TO SCHOOL?
ADULT EDUCATION REINVENTED

Adult learning is recognised by the European policymakers as a sector needing improvement. According to the Council of the European Union (*Council Resolution on a Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning*, 2011) there is a need for adults to enhance their personal and professional skills and competences. Given the need to reduce the risk of social exclusion and instability on the labour market, this applies particularly to low-skilled and low-qualified citizens of the European Union. The Council wants to enhance the possibilities for all adults to access high-quality learning opportunities at any time in their lives in order to promote:

- personal and professional development;
- empowerment;
- adaptability;
- employability;
- active participation in society.

Despite these EU level policy initiatives, and also Member State level interventions, challenges persist since a relatively low number of adults in the EU access high quality and relevant learning programmes (European Commission, 2017). According to the latest Eurostat data, only 10.9% of adults in the EU took part in formal or non-formal learning activity in 2017, showing a slight increase from 10.8% in 2016 (*The European Union Labour Force Survey*, 2019). This EU average conceals considerable disparities between Member States, with adult learning participation rates in 2017 ranging from 30.4% in Sweden to 1.1% in Romania. Low motivation, basic digital skills and a lack of social care facilities to help citizens combine family and work responsibilities with learning, are among main obstacles that need attention. Online education seems to address some of these barriers. New methods of communication and technological tools have a potential to transform learning. Over the course of the last century many visionaries saw the equalizing impact of new technologies on educational outcomes. In 1912 some people believed that phones lines would enable video courses (Ithiel de Sola Pool, 1983, p. 146). By the same token, television was supposed to bring the classroom home. In 21st century the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) marked a new era for students around the globe giving them access to academic courses. However, we need to acknowledge that the internet and other tools will not automatically democratize education. In fact, the role of technology in learning plays out very differently depending on a person's socioeconomic standing. There are four main factors that influence the way a person pursues learning in his or her adult years:

- educational background;
- income;
- location;
- technology resources (digital skills, access to the hardware and the internet).

Individuals with less formal education and those who are unemployed participate much less in digital learning. In Portugal the research revealed

the association between the educational level of parents and children – intergenerational transmission of education, particularly strong in the case of mothers. The social gap in continuing education that has been repeatedly identified in formal non-digital continuing education offerings is also present in the digital sphere. People who want to use online learning effectively should have basic digital skills. *The Digital Competence Framework 2.0* describes components of digital competence. What is more, online learning requires learners to be open to new forms of learning, to be able to communicate and collaborate with others and to be aware of risks of new technologies. On the other hand, for less privileged groups, online education is convenient because it allows learning without exposing their weaknesses and – at the same time – leaving the formal model of the school. An adult-centered approach promotes learner's responsibility and autonomy. Online education often employs innovative forms of teaching and learning, therefore, learning environments can be better tailored to the needs of the targeted audiences and embrace their diversity (not only in terms of age and socio-economic background, but also in terms of learning abilities and learning styles). Use of digital tools contributes to the development of creativity, autonomy and entrepreneurship, skills that are particularly valued in the labour market.

In the light of different socio-demographic challenges the European Community faces, the Partnership created within the framework of Erasmus+ Programme will strive to implement innovative and sustainable methods to boost adult learning in Germany, Finland, Poland, Portugal and Romania. Starting online learning results in tremendous benefits for adults but requires some encouragement and guidance. We think that libraries and librarians hold a unique position to help adult learners to discover online informal education.

INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE: WHY DO PEOPLE LEARN?

Those who pursue learning for personal or professional reasons say there are a number of reasons they start educational activities. Personal learners seek to strengthen their knowledge and skills for a mixture of individual and altruistic reasons. For employees who take a course or get extra training, their reasons for doing so range from career growth to job security. There is a psychological perspective of motivation that uses categories, such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation or expansive learning, which aims to expand one's possibilities, as opposed to defensive learning, which aims to fend off something undesirable or negative (see for example Schrader, 2018, chapter 8). The motivational structure can be complex. People may be motivated not only by the wish to learn, but also by the wish to get to know other people, to do something that is different from their daily routines, etc. This is why, usually, a decision to start a new learning activity is a combination of both motivations – intrinsic and extrinsic:

1. External expectation (job related requests, organisational or technological changes at work);
2. Personal development (new competences, opportunity to use new set of skills in daily life);
3. Career development (i.e. new career opportunities, risk prevention of losing a job, long term financial goal, better chances to win a job interview);
4. Stimulation, entertainment (new challenges, end of boredom);
5. Social (to impress friends and family,

meet new people, for pleasure);

6. Thirst for knowledge (to excel in a given area, to excel one's hobby, to learn for its own sake);

7. Social contribution (to learn useful skills in order to serve others, voluntary activities).

In Finland lifelong learning is popular and practiced in many ways. The most common reason for participating in informal adult education in this country is better management of work assignments. More than every other person reported that the reason to participate was the development of knowledge and skills on a topic of interest to oneself. Women reported the development of knowledge and/or skills on a topic of interest and health reasons as

their motivation to learn more frequently than men (Niemi & Ruuskanen, 2018, pp. 58-60). The general rule is that adult learners select educational activities directly related to their professional career.

INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE: WHY DO PEOPLE GO ONLINE?

There is no doubt that doing an online course is among the least popular activities in Europe. It is relatively widespread only in Sweden and Finland with ca. 17% of internet users participating in online courses in 2017 (*The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI)*, 2019). The authors of the report experienced a relative shortage of empirical research conducted in this area.

3b7 Doing an online course All Individuals (aged 16-74)
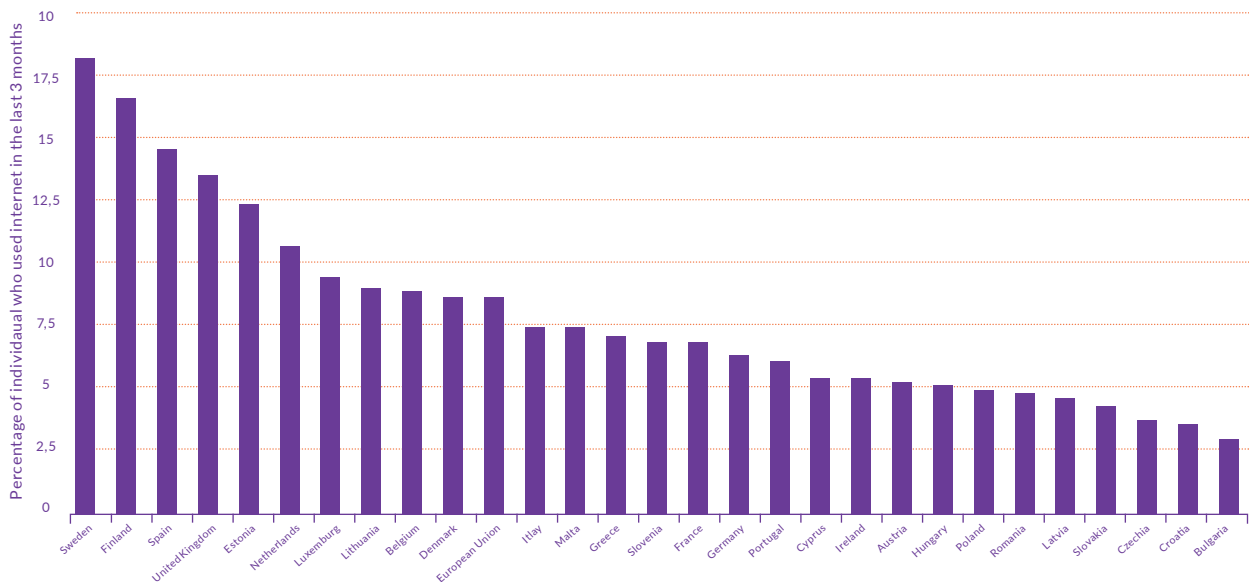
European Commission, Digital Scoreboard

Table 1. Source: DESI

3b7 Doing on online course, by All Individauls (aged 16-74) EU

European Union

European Commission, Digital Scoreboard
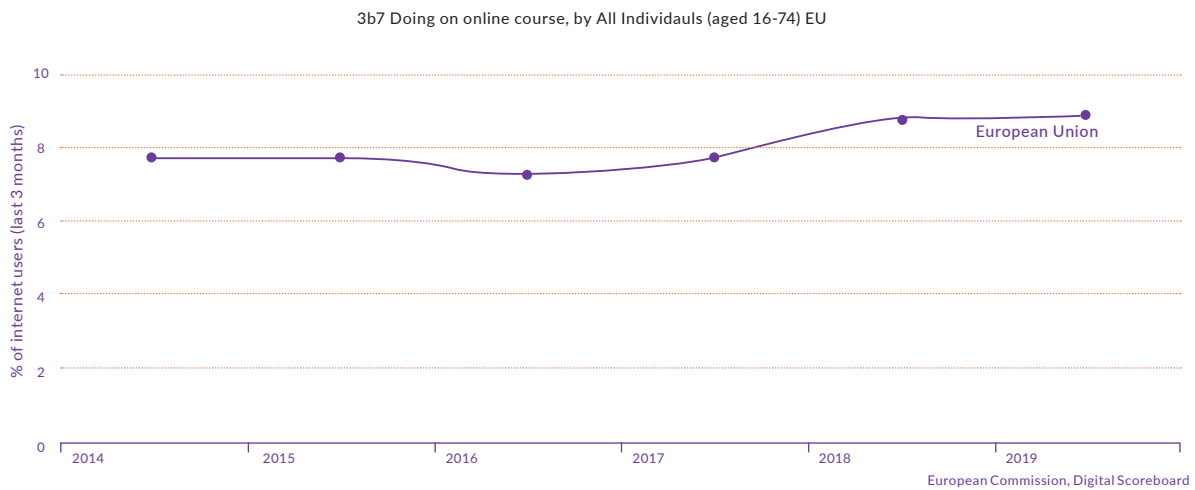
Table 2. Source: DESI

Due to numerous professional and family obligations, adults do not have much time for personal and professional development. They are pragmatic and go online when they have to solve a problem or want an answer to a question which arises in their everyday life – this is why the explainer videos, tutorials and multimedia content in the form of 'pills of knowledge' are so popular. Most adults do not even plan to complete the course they have subscribed to. Therefore, drop-out rate should not be the only criteria to measure student's satisfaction with an online course. The research *Understanding Student Motivation, Behaviors and Perceptions in MOOCs* shows that the participants are actively seeking only those elements and pieces of knowledge that can help them solve a problem they have met or fulfill a task they had. Adults are less interested in studying in depth.
It is worth mentioning that the people who are out of work as well as the low-qualified citizens do not take part in digital learning activities (as a part of non-formal ongoing education /training) as often as those who are professionally active and highly qualified.

JUST IN TIME, JUST ENOUGH, JUST FOR ME

We have analysed research concerning characteristics of adult learning processes. Adults learn best when the learning has the following characteristics:

- Acknowledges learner's experience. Adults have very diverse knowledge and have much to contribute;
- Is active. Hands-on experience and interactive activities help learners process information and react to new knowledge. According to learning experience designers courses become more practical if learners are asked to do some tasks related to the problems they face and then get feedback from tutors and peers, which implies education in small groups.
- Provides feedback. Without timely feedback chances to learn new skills are lower.
- Is autonomous and self-directed. Adults are pragmatic and want to have full picture of what, when and how they will learn. It is vital that an online student accepts his or her role as an active participant in the learning process.
- Is directed towards a goal. If a goal is

precise and measurable, adults will be more engaged in learning process. Short courses, with a structure and sequence of simple and effective learning content that keep the participant motivated work best.

- Is relevant and practical. When adults can relate the learning goals and outcomes to their life and aspirations, they can be very efficient and resilient.
- Takes place respectfully. People want to be recognised and feel that their contribution matter.

Many educational experts claim that technology can be leveraged to mold the learning experience to individual students' needs and learning styles. This style of teaching tailors the educational process to the strengths and weaknesses of individual students. Learning styles of adult learners differ. According to the researchers there are 6 modes of learning: rational, emotional, relational, physical, metaphoric and spiritual. People with different personalities would choose different forms of online interaction. As the researchers pointed out, the more modes are activated, the more effective the learning process is (Ning, H.K., Downing, K. 2010). More and more online courses are based on multimedia content. The biggest empirical research of how video production affect student engagement, shows that:

- Shorter videos (less than 6 minutes long) are much more engaging.
- Videos that intersperse an instructor's talking head with slides are more engaging than the slides alone.
- Videos produced with a more personal feel could be more engaging than high-fidelity studio recordings.

- Khan-style tablet drawing tutorials are more engaging than PowerPoint slides or code screencasts.
- Even high quality pre-recorded classroom lectures are not as engaging as when they are chopped up for a MOOC.
- Videos where instructors speak fairly fast and with high enthusiasm are more engaging.
- Students engage differently with lecture and tutorial videos.

Adaptive learning, adult-center approach, learning experience design are among the best methods to boost engagement of students and make the online education both efficient and effective. The question is, what is the quality of online content? Do adult learners in Europe have a versatile and fulfilling offer of digital courses and tools to engage with? Further analysis might be needed, but according to our preliminary desk research there is a room for improvement.

CHAPTER I

ADULT LEARNING STRATEGIES

In this chapter we present our findings regarding the adults' habits and preferences of learning. In order to produce this material, we have collected statistical data, research results, reports and conclusions from literature dedicated to the subject. The above mentioned sources of information were complemented with results of surveys conducted by the project's national teams in their countries. We reflect on such issues as: how popular the lifelong learning is in a given country, what forms or methods the adults choose when they want to broaden their knowledge and develop competences, and what motivates them to learn. We take a closer look at the formal educational systems in our countries and check how they influence people's attitudes towards learning as adults, and how they equip the adults with sufficient skills to become lifelong learners.

FINLAND

Adult education is very popular in Finland and the participation rate is relatively high in comparison with other European countries. Finland has also a long history of participation and promotion of adult education (Opetushallitus, n.d.).

The main objectives of Finnish adult education policy can be defined as ensuring the availability and competence of the labour force, providing educational opportunities for the entire adult population and strengthening social cohesion and equity. The objectives should support efforts to extend working life, raise the employment rate, improve productivity, implement the conditions for lifelong learning and enhance multiculturalism (Opetushallitus, n.d.). Adult education in Finland comprises education and training opportunities that lead to a degree or certificate, the so-called 'liberal adult education' and staff-development as well as other training offer provided to employees by employers. In addition to the above, adult education includes also labour market training, which is mainly addressed to the unemployed (Opetushallitus, n.d.). In Finland, adults can study at vocational schools, universities, technical universities, open universities and folk high schools

(aikuiskoulutus.fi, a). According to Niemi and Ruuskanen (2018), about 1.6 million Finns aged between 18-64 participated in adult education in 2017, which corresponds to almost half of the population (48%) of Finland. Women were more often involved in adult education than men. More than half of women (54%) participated in adult education, with a male participation rate of 43 percent. The following groups participated in adult education more often than the average: 25-44 year olds, those with higher levels of education, the employed, and people living in urban municipalities (Niemi & Ruuskanen, 2018, pp. 18-22).

In 2017, approximately 2 million Finns (69 percent of the population between 18–64) studied in self-directed (informal) studies. The most common method of self-directed learning was studying with the use of a computer and the internet. Women studied informally slightly more often than men – women accounted for 71%, men for 67%. Most active in informal studies were those under the age of 45, those with a degree in higher education, those with managerial position, and those living in urban municipalities (Niemi & Ruuskanen, 2018, pp. 18-22).

In Finland online learning plays an important role in adult education, as the studies are usually carried out alongside work and online learning provides an opportunity for flexible studying and independent scheduling. Online learning also allows for distant learning (i.e.) using the studies opportunities offered in another city or place) (aikuiskoulutus.fi, b). According to Niemi and Ruuskanen (2018, pp. 58-60) most common reasons for participating in formal adult education in Finland were:

- the development of career prospects;
- a better chance of getting a job;
- a better chance of retraining

for a new career;
- development of knowledge and skills of an interesting topic;
- getting a certificate or a degree.

In Finland, the most common reason for participating in informal adult education is better management of work assignments. More than every other person reported that the reason to participate was the development of knowledge and skills on a topic of interest. Women, more often than men, reported the development of knowledge and/or skills on a topic of interest and health reasons as their motivation for studies (Niemi & Ruuskanen, 2018, pp. 58-60).

According to the International PIAAC (The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competences), up to 30 percent of Finland's 16 to 65-year-old adults, about one million people, have inadequate ICT skills. Age and education are the most important factors that correlate to the possession of skills. Those who have the lowest skills, participate in adult education less often than others (Mäkinen, 2016). In addition to the older population, the first generation of immigrants emerge as the other underprivileged group of Finnish residents. Uneducated immigrant women, and particularly the immigrant stay-at-home mothers remain at risk of being marginalized, as they become easily excluded from working life and social networks other than those that comprise close family members (Mäkinen & Sihvonen, 2016).

In the Finnish National Core Curriculum for elementary education (grades 1 to 9), the skills of thinking and learning are emphasized as the basis for the development of other skills, including those that are vital in lifelong learning activities. Development of these skills is central in all school subjects throughout elementary education (OPS, 2014, pp. 17, 19-20).

The information and communications technology (ICT) skills are also highlighted in the curriculum. ICT is perceived as an essential part of modern learning environments. It is used to strengthen students' participation and co-working skills, as well as to support students' personal learning paths. Every student should have access to the ICT tools (OPS, 2014, pp. 23, 29). The Core Curriculum mentions libraries as a potential learning environment and partner institutions to schools. Schools can organise their own school libraries or co-operate with local libraries. Libraries provide active and stimulating learning environments as well as versatile working methods. Together, they encourage lifelong learning and active citizenship (OPS, 2014, p. 42).

GERMANY

Adult learning in Germany includes formal, non-formal and informal learning activities. There are various segments of non-formal education and training: 'betriebliche Weiterbildung' (which might be translated as employer-sponsored job-related training at the workplace), 'individuelle berufsbezogene

Weiterbildung' (individual job-related continuing education/further training) and the 'nicht berufsbezogene Weiterbildung' (non job-related continuing education/training). It is getting more and more important in Germany – as far as reports on continuing education/training are concerned – to use the categories 'formal', 'non-formal' and 'informal learning'. The German word 'Weiterbildung' is often used as an equivalent for non-formal learning activities. However, it is sometimes used to describe job-related further training inside or outside a company, whereas the word 'Erwachsenenbildung', which is usually translated as 'adult education', is a term used for general continuing education, although a language course offered at an adult education centre may also be related to the participants' attempts to improve their career prospects. Formal learning activities in the case of adults who have completed their vocational training or have graduated from university, may also be called 'Weiterbildung'. As can be seen from this short outline, the topic is multi-faceted and it is very difficult, sometimes even impossible, to make comparisons between different sets of data. Although it may not be feasible to give an exact overview of adult learning and the motivation of adult learners, it is important for adults to make sure that they find the right form of learning which takes into account their preferences. The motivational structure can be complex; people may be motivated not only by the wish to learn, but also by the wish to get to know other

people, to do something which is different from their daily routines, etc. (cf. Brüning, Kuwan, 2002, p. 26). When asked why they took part in non-formal education/training activities (multiple answers possible), more than 50% of those surveyed in Germany for the Adult Education Survey in 2016 stated that they did it in order to be better able to carry out their occupational activities ('um meine berufliche Tätigkeit besser ausüben zu können'). People seem to be aware that in the 21st century it is necessary to adapt to new job requirements and to be prepared to keep learning throughout their careers. More than 30% stated they did it because they wanted to expand their knowledge/ their skills concerning a topic which interested them (*Weiterbildungsverhalten in Deutschland* 2016, 2017, p. 119–120, and Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, ed., 2016, p. 39). In the survey *Monitor Digitale Bildung* that monitored continuing education in Germany in the digital age, learners were asked: 'Welche Lernformen machen Ihnen Spaß?' (might be translated as: Which forms of learning do you like?), and 'Was motiviert Sie zum Lernen?' (What motivates you to learn?) – the questions referred to learning with digital media. The answers showed that the responders were fond of forms of learning which allowed for a high degree of autonomy (retrieving information from the internet, getting familiar with a topic via explainer videos/video tutorials) and that they liked the flipped classroom concept and blended learning better than online-only courses (Bertelsmann Stiftung, ed., 2018, p. 19). In 2016, according to the Adult Education Survey, the unemployed, people out of work and low-qualified people did not take part in digital learning activities (as part of non-formal continuing education/training) as often as people in work and those who

were highly qualified; for this and for more details on different groups of people see Weiterbildungsverhalten in Deutschland 2016, 2017, p. 249. The percentage given for the unemployed is 13%, which is a significantly lower rate than the 23% average participation in digital non-formal education and training. After all, non-formal continuing education and training at the workplace is a form of learning to which the unemployed do not have access. The social gap that has been described for digital non-formal continuing education and training is also visible in the survey on digital learning called *Monitor Digitale Bildung*. It must be pointed out, however, that the percentages given in Weiterbildungsverhalten in Deutschland 2016, 2017, p. 249, refer to non-formal continuing education and training, whereas the percentages given in *Monitor Digitale Bildung* (Bertelsmann Stiftung, ed., 2018, p. 26) refer to digital learning in the field of 'Weiterbildung' in general. Moreover, apprentices or university students surveyed for the other Monitor surveys conducted by the Bertelsmann Stiftung were not included in the Monitor dealing with 'Weiterbildung', whereas elderly people were included. But although percentages differ according to the design of the surveys, the findings on adult online learning reflect similar trends. The *Monitor Digitale Bildung* (Bertelsmann Stiftung, ed., 2018, p. 62) sums it up: "Individuals with less formal education and those who are unemployed participate much less in digital learning. The social gap in continuing education that has been repeatedly identified in formal non-digital continuing education offerings is also present in the digital sphere. Furthermore, teachers and administrators largely hold the view that digital learning primarily facilitates self-directed learning and the advancement of

high-performing participants. Only one third of teachers and 35 percent of administrators expect advantages for less effective participants or heterogeneous learning groups.'

The majority of experts from the continuing education sector who were asked for their opinion for the *Monitor Digitale Bildung*, thought that digital learning has the potential to help people overcome barriers. However, they differentiated between groups of underprivileged people; they held the view that people with physical disabilities, people living in rural areas and refugees benefit more from using digital media than socially disadvantaged persons (cf. Bertelsmann Stiftung, ed., 2018, p. 28). The formal educational system is supposed to enable people to develop learning strategies – also in the area of online learning – and to prepare the ground for lifelong learning. Libraries are places of learning, and if schools are interested in letting young people know what libraries have to offer, they can profit from the cooperation with libraries. Schools can book guided tours, which also point out online resources of the library, or they can register for workshops where young people learn how to use resources systematically (an example: the Methodentraining in the Cologne Public Library). The cooperation can take the form of a Bildungspartnerschaft (education partnership; for North Rhine-Westphalia see Bildungsportal des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen). A survey of the primary, secondary and tertiary education sector and of continuing education and training in Germany was conducted by the Bertelsmann Stiftung; the survey is called *Monitor Digitale Bildung*. "The results of the Digital Education Monitor on the state of digital learning in Germany's schools reveal that school directors, teachers and students

are generally prepared to deal with the topic of digital media and believe that digitalization will change education. And yet despite this fundamental openness, there are still several hurdles on the road to the digitized school based on educationally sound principles" (Bertelsmann Stiftung, ed., 2017a, p. 55). Digitalization in schools is expected to be boosted by the DigitalPakt Schule, which was agreed upon by the Federation (the Bund) and the Länder in 2019 to improve the digital infrastructure in schools (*Wissenswertes zum DigitalPakt Schule*, 2019). Universities in Germany have introduced digital learning opportunities, but the *Monitor Digitale Bildung* points out: "The technology and infrastructure for digital learning at German universities received good ratings from all those surveyed. However, the educational potential of digitalization often remains untapped. Lectures supplemented with educational videos or presentation tools are not uncommon, but there is far less use of social media or of innovative formats such as collaborative flipped-classroom models" (Bertelsmann Stiftung, ed., 2017, p. 51). The vocational education and training system, also known as the dual training system ('Duale Berufsausbildung') in Germany, faces similar challenges as the other educational sectors. The report mentions the task of "meshing the course content offered by the schools with that of the companies that take on apprentices", which should be given more attention (Bertelsmann Stiftung, ed., 2016, p. 40). Linking learning content to what is expected in everyday life seems to be a good concept for all sorts of learning activities. It means taking into account the challenges individuals are confronted with in their lives.

POLAND

The influence of the formal educational system on attitudes and skills of adult learners may be analysed from two points of view:

1. What are official assumptions that underlie this system (the official agenda);
2. To what extend these official assumptions have been really implemented (the hidden agenda).

Official assumptions, namely objectives and principles of a given level of education (primary school, secondary school) in Poland, have been described in the National Standards (national curriculum). According to this document, on both levels of education students should be taught competences related to learning as well as digital skills, that would allow them to use online tools in responsible, and safe way. In the Standards for secondary schools (*Rozporządzenie ministra edukacji narodowej z dnia 30 stycznia 2018 r. w sprawie podstawy programowej kształcenia ogólnego dla liceum ogólnokształcącego, technikum oraz branżowej szkoły II stopnia*) the statement has been included that the students should develop "their passion to discover the world", and become lifelong learners, especially in the context of further education and professional career. It has been also stated that learning is a social process in which students should be able to cooperate with others, e.g. through developing and implementing educational projects. The National Standards require that schools prepare students to use internet as a source of knowledge acquired in a critical way, to communicate with others online, and to use different digital tools. In general, students who have graduated from secondary schools

should not have problems with using simple interfaces of most e-learning platforms. In order to make it possible the National Standards include requirements related to the access to internet, computers, and other relevant equipment in each school. In reality (the hidden agenda) the situation of Polish schools does not reflect the assumptions included in the National Standards. The key problem is related to the dominant paradigm of the teaching: it is expected that students acquire and memorize extensive number of facts "delivered" by teachers and then "reproduce" these facts during tests and final exams. Students are not expected to be self-responsible learners, thinking in critical way, and generally developing higher level skills from typical educational goals taxonomies. In this model digital tools are used mainly to support this traditional way of teaching. That is why according to the report *Polska szkoła w dobie cyfryzacji* (2017) even if 50% of teachers declare using digital tools, most of them mean just PowerPoint presentations. It is confirmed by the report *Diagnoza stanu kształcenia na odległość w Polsce i wybranych krajach Unii Europejskiej*, Warszawa 2013 (Chmielewski K. et al., 2013), where most

teachers do not use e-learning as a tool for professional development. In addition to that, the whole paradigm gives little space for learning in groups, cooperation and implementation of the educational projects, which are not obligatory. In general, students have a limited opportunity to use the whole potential of digital tools, especially for communication, and collaboration. Many schools, especially in rural areas, have limited access to internet. In order to solve this problem a programme The Nationwide Educational Network (Ogólnopolska Sieć Edukacyjna) has been recently introduced. Another programme e-Manuals (e-Podręczniki) is being implemented in order to provide multimedia resources, that comply with the National Standards. However, if the internet and multimedia resources are to be used by teachers, they have to develop their digital competences. That is why the Ministry of National Education has recently introduced training project including 75,000 teachers. Those adults who continue their education at the university level – according to the National Statistical Office (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2018) at the end of 2017 it was almost 1.3 mln people – are expected to have basic learning skills required from students. Learning how to learn is not a part of the traditional university curriculum. Students are expected to learn on their own. The same as at the lower level of education learning at the university is mainly an individual process. Group projects and collaboration are relatively rare. However, unlike primary or secondary schools, university students have a chance to gain some experience through taking part in e-learning courses. It is difficult to assess the scale of these achievements, because the data is not collected by the National Statistical Office or available in any report. However, there are a few reports that cover universities in big cities (capitals of regions). For example, research

carried out in 28 universities located in Szczecin revealed that even if 50% of them provide some access to online learning, only two of them offer e-learning courses from professional platforms, and one of them enable students to study one of the subjects fully online (Szewczyk, 2018). Similar results have been achieved through research based on questionnaires conducted in the Silesia region (Komańda, 2014). Approx. 7% of students had an opportunity to study any subject fully online. If these numbers could be extrapolated to the whole sample, we could say that less than 10% of all students got some experience in e-learning at the university. This number may become even smaller in the near future because the Ministry of Science and Higher Education has recently introduced a new law that require more hours of given subject to be delivered offline in order to fulfill the new standard.

To sum it up, students of all levels of education (primary, secondary, higher) are not taught how to be self-responsible learners, including relevant attitudes and skills. They have limited possibilities to act as learners in schools, because of still dominant, traditional paradigm of teaching. Some teachers (e.g. non-formal group called Super Teachers (Superbelfrzy, 2019) put efforts to overcome such approach but the education as a system is not supporting such attempts. Primary and secondary schools' teachers rather rarely use digital tools, and in some institutions even access to internet is still problematic. It is quite similar at the university level, where students are expected to operate effectively as individual learners, but have to develop such skills on their own. Probably less than 10% of them have had any experience with e-learning as a part of the system. In general, formal educational system provides young people, future adult learners and LCs participants, with the desired competences to support lifelong learning in a very limited way.

PORTUGAL

The Portuguese Ministry of Education (Direção-Geral da Educação) has organised the adult education in Portugal according to two fundamental areas: the recurrent adult education and the out-of-school education. In the Basic Law of the Educational System it is stated that the recurrent adult education is a special modality of school education, and is defined as the out-of-school education which aims to enable each person to increase their knowledge and develop their potential, in addition to the school education, in a perspective of permanent education.

In Portugal, one of the most popular forms of the recurrent adult education are language courses taught in language schools, particularly English, French and German. There are also multiple schools that offer courses of computer science, management training, tourism, subjects related to various areas of industry, etc. Nowadays, as the professional training is expanding, there is also a growing number of companies where in-house training courses or even vocational retraining are carried out, often financed by the communities. Such courses can also be the initiative of professional or business associations. Adult education in Portugal is often linked to local development projects. In most cases, they have been supported by the State and aimed to promote cultural and social development of local communities, particularly rural ones, and to improve the levels of education among their residents. According to the OECD report Portugal, in *Education at a Glance 2018* (OECD, 2018, pp. 3-6) the participation in lifelong learning activities increased by around 20% in a decade, particularly as a result of increased participation in non-formal education, which doubled between 2007 and 2016. It is higher for men and for people of 35-44 years of age. Participation of the Portuguese in adult schooling increases, particularly among those with lower levels of school education. Workers, and other professionals are more and more active in lifelong learning.

In June 2019 research was conducted at the Lúcio Craveiro da Silva Library in Braga for the purpose of the Learning Circles in Libraries project. 20 volunteers were interviewed face-to-face and one via email (the email interviewee being the coordinator of the TecMinho e-Learning Unit, Ana Dias). The research sample comprised 7 men and 14 women in four age groups: 18-29 year olds, 30-40 year olds, 41-59 year olds and over 60 year olds. Eight of the interviewees were employed, four were students, four were retired and four unemployed. A significant percentage of the research participants were engaged in the formal education (as students of universities, technical universities, or other schools), although the participation of older population was lower. Concerning the participation in non-formal and informal

education, the percentage was slightly lower. The majority of interviewees have declared that reading paper books and manuals remained their most frequently used learning methods, although they also reported using computers and the internet. Regarding online courses, the attendance level was relatively small (6 out of 20 interviewees took part in such a course). According to the *Implementation Guide for the Competence Strategy for Portugal report* (OECD, 2018), a highly skilled workforce is critical to help Portugal recover fully from the last recession and meet the challenges of an increasingly global and digital economy. While Portugal has made good efforts in boosting its educational performance, the population is ageing and the skills gap between the better educated youth and older adults is widening. Many adults are at risk of falling behind. With the economy growing again, Portugal has an opportunity to reinforce the adult-learning system by raising both its accessibility and quality, especially for adults with low skills. This, in turn, can lead to a greater growth and well-being for all. Maintaining motivation in adult learning is essential, because motivation:

- helps to improve the adults' basic skills;

- helps to achieve a recognised qualification;

- helps adults to develop knowledge and skills, other than those for vocational purposes;

- facilitates transition to the labour market for the unemployed or those at a risk of unemployment;

- opens up higher education opportunities for adults;

- enables adult employees to develop their work-related skills (OECD, 2018).

The above findings correspond with the research

conducted by the Lúcio Craveiro da Silva Library in Braga, in which the majority of the interviewees referred to personal and professional development as well as improving their performance at work or even finding a new job as reasons to continue learning. For all age groups the development of skills and abilities in a topic of interest were the most important reason. Successive governments in Portugal have pursued extensive educational reforms. These range from the extension of compulsory schooling and the reorganisation of the school network, to the development of vocational education and training and the creation of new tertiary education pathways. Adult learning has also been a focus, with policies helping to raise interest in learning among adults. However, participation in adult learning remains slightly below the European Union average despite the need for many adults to upskill. Participation in adult learning remains unequal in Portugal. Adults in Portugal, especially those with low education levels, continue to report low motivation for further learning, despite the progress made in the past decade. Low motivation is still the main barrier to participation. To boost motivation, Portugal can develop the enhanced guidance role of its adult learning centres (Qualifica Centres), as well as its system for assessing skills in demand (Pires, 2019). Raising awareness about the benefits of learning is especially important in overcoming motivational barriers. Useful approaches include providing better information on benefits and tailoring information to reach low-skilled adults. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to design and implement digital inclusion initiatives and programmes that are flexible enough to meet various needs and overcome possible obstacles and constraints, particularly in case of citizens who are engaged neither in formal education,

nor vocational training, the unemployed, the migrants and other minorities, as well as senior citizens or people with special needs. In order to ensure a fair and cohesive environment, promote balanced and sustainable development and properly prepare the population for the future, it is essential to raise awareness of the importance of digital skills and create more spaces and dynamics where people can have access to resources, content and training opportunities. These goals can be achieved through networking communities and collaborative work that is sensitive to contexts, populations and problems, taking into account the structural inequalities that still persist between various regions of Portugal. The Technological Plan for Education (PTE) was the largest technological modernization programme in Portuguese schools, approved in 2007 by the Government with the aim to place Portugal among the five most advanced European countries. The PTE interconnected, in an integrated and coherent way, the development of the technological infrastructure of the schools, the provision of contents and services online and the reinforcement of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) competences of students and teachers. The PTE assumed that each school in Portugal would be equipped with a printer, a projector, a computer with internet connection in each classroom and an interactive whiteboard for every two rooms. At the end of 2009, there were 228,361 computers installed in schools, 7,613 interactive boards and 28,697 classrooms in the 5th and 12th year of schooling with video projectors. Such projects as the Novas Oportunidades, e-escola e e-escolinha, that have been implemented in accordance with the PTE, have enabled thousands of students and adults to acquire laptops at affordable prices. For

many thousands of students and their families, access to computers and internet was opened, which could not been achieved otherwise. At the end of 2011, about 98% of Portuguese students had a home computer, the number increased by 41% between 2000 and 2009. The projects and investments associated with them allowed Portugal to achieve good results in the use of technology in the area of education. However, the lack of strategic approach and the disinvestment that followed in consecutive years did not trigger the ambitious results hoped for. Since 2010, the school infrastructure have not been upgraded, with the equipment becoming more and more obsolete and the speed of the internet too slow. After nine years of the PTE's implementation there is still no systematic, structured or gradual investment in technology in Portuguese schools. Portugal has been making efforts to educate the younger generation of the population by stimulating and strengthening digital literacy and digital skills in all lifelong learning and teaching cycles, including the development of scientific reasoning, collaborative work and design skills. The new generations are increasingly advancing in such competences through a permanent and coordinated actions of educational and vocational training systems. This involves reviewing programme contents, teaching processes, educational resources, providing the training of teachers and trainers, and ensuring lifelong training actions. In order to achieve these goals, it is essential to integrate the digital competences and resources in the pedagogical processes and ensure the existence of adequate technological infrastructure. As the results of research conducted by the Lúcio Craveiro da Silva Library in Braga showed, there was a balance in the answer to the question: "Did the school prepare you for the need to

learn throughout life?" Out of 20 interviewees, 9 answered "No", ten answered "Yes", and one person did not respond to that question at all. The research also revealed, that the age of the participants did not affect their answers to this question. In other responds, however, the representatives of older groups admitted that they learned about new technologies outside the formal education system.

ROMANIA

For the purpose of the Learning Circles in Libraries project Fundatia Progress has conducted research in order to check if Romanian adults participate in any form of education, and if so, what their preferences and motivations are.

The research was based on interviewing 17 adults of different ages and backgrounds. The results have revealed that the participants preferred both online and face-to-face (stationary) courses in order to improve their knowledge and competences. The range and type of contents differed from one participant to another. One respondent (female, aged 47) had attended only two face-to-face courses within two years before the research, but, at the same time, she graduated from the university the year before, in order to get a degree to support her job advancement. Another respondent, (female, aged 23) explained that she had attended 25 online courses, provided free of charge by the company she worked for, or purchased by herself on another online platform. An interviewee (male, aged 29) attended 12 courses, including 8 online and 4 face to face. Another participant (female, aged 47) attended 4 online and face-to-face courses. She was not motivated by getting a degree but by the wish to develop her competences. A few participants, who studied at the university at the time of research, mentioned their studies along with other training courses they had attended. The research showed that the participants had been engaged in both formal and non-formal education, attended both online and face-to-face (stationary) courses, while most of their further learning opportunities were provided by their employer. Participants mentioned a few differences they saw among online and offline education, especially face-to-face training. One interviewee (male, aged 29) declared that online courses implied more motivation to be finalized, if a learner was going through that course alone. "I attended online courses with a facilitator, and this has not been too different from traditional, in-class training. Personally, I prefer these, because there is a higher flexibility from the trainer, you are free to ask questions from behind your computer screen, without

feeling stupid in front of other people". Another participant (female, aged 44) stated that in the online environment it was more important to go through the material than to get a certificate for finishing the course. "Eliminating the graduation pressure is compulsory in order to increase the level of acceptability and openness of participants towards the new knowledge". Another interviewee (female, aged 23) thought that online courses were more efficient than face-to-face training, but if someone opts for an online course it should mean that the subject is really important for him or her. Even if face-to-face courses allowed for personal interaction and exercise, those available online were easier to access and probably cheaper.

The research also revealed that the respondents had both good experiences with online and offline courses and had a variety of experiences with different levels of education. These make them subject experts in terms of online adult education, and a good resource in understanding the inner motives of someone who engages in this type of activity. According to the research study *Educatia Adultilor. Anul 2016* (2017, pp 30-31), the reasons for people's participation in non-formal learning were connected to performing better the tasks they did at their work (49.8%). Male participants mentioned this correlation more often, as well as those aged within 55-64 years of age (61.7%) and those with higher education (59.4%). In some cases, further non-formal learning has been requested by the employer (34.9%) or because the legislation has changed, and the skills needed to be accordingly updated (58.8%). Only 26.9% of the participants in this research study attended this type of education for intrinsic reasons – to know more or to increase their career perspectives. In case of the employed, 76.6% participants have

participated in non-formal learning events, and for most of them the provider of such education was the employer (45.5%), while other providers were represented by 28.6% of the cases. 63.1% of the activities performed 12 months prior to the period of the research study have been certified by a diploma or attendance certificate, because such document has been requested by the employer or was required by the law. For more than one third of the participants, the taxes and other expenses incurred by the attendance (manuals and other materials) have been covered by themselves. The payment of taxes and other expenses has been covered by a third party (employer, public employment services, relatives or friends), while for 16.5% of participants, the attendance has been for free. Taking these numbers into account, it may be concluded that there is a potentially large niche in Romania for free courses. However, for an initiative like Learning Circles to be successful, the attractiveness of free courses should be presented with a focus on skills needed at work, and a necessity to issue a some sort of a certificate of attendance. According to the *Education and Training Monitor 2018 - Country analysis* (2018, pp 239), in Romania, in terms of education, most of the targets are beyond those set by the European Commission for the 2020 target.

Romania · Eu target · Eu average
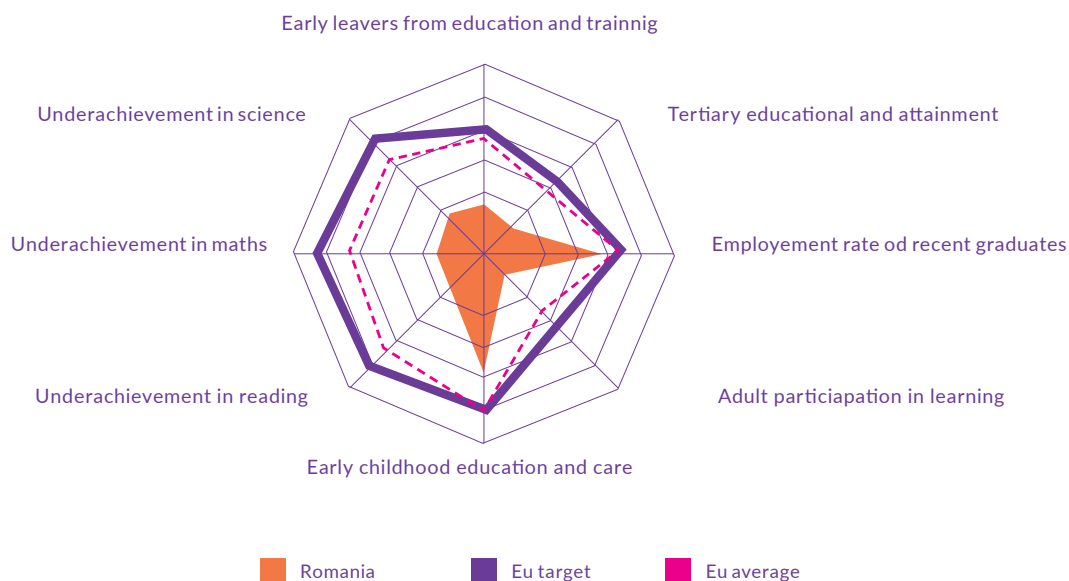
Graph 1. Source: *Education and Training Monitor 2018 – Country analysis*, p.168

According to the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (2018) Romania's labour force participation in education rate is one of the lowest in the EU, especially for women and lower-educated people. Now, while Romania's target of 26.7% by 2020 is achievable, this remains a low percentage compared with the EU average of 39.1% in 2016 and the EU 2020 target of 40%. Romania is behind comparable countries in the number of graduate students per population aged 20–29 in STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, mathematics). At the same time, university graduates are perceived to possess sufficient, though overly theoretical, academic skills, while vocational and educational training (VET) students or graduates have outdated skills because of obsolete equipment in school workshops, as well as outdated teaching methods and teaching experiences. In research study performed by Moldoveanu et al (2017) persons with the least interest in attending non-formal education are mainly people living in rural areas (41.5%) and the unemployed (53.8%). In terms of barriers to participating to education,

34.8% of the respondents mentioned the family obligations, out of these respondents 43.8% were women. Age has been considered by 21.7% of the respondents as an obstacle to education and this answer was more frequent among the 55-64 year olds, 61.3% of them mentioning this factor. As a conclusion, if we were to look at the underprivileged groups in terms of access to the non-formal education, we would say they were both women and elderly people from rural areas as well as young people (14 to 18 years of age) who were not engaged in any tertiary education. The reasons for their lack of participation could be family obligations and self image (too old to participate in education) as well as the perception that the skills they gain may be either outdated or too theoretical. According to the European Area of Skills and Qualifications (2014) only 13% of Romanians think that they can get online education, only 21% of Romanians are happy with the results of the online education, while 59% of them choose the option 'non applicable', which means that they have never had a contact with it or do not know what online education is. In a research

study performed by the Fundatia Progress, several respondents confirmed that the school / the formal learning system has not provided them with the attitude or behaviour of the lifelong learners. The interviewee (female, aged 47) stated: "The teachers never told us about it. The first time I have heard about this concept was 10 years after graduating"; and, similarly, the other (female, aged 39): "Not at all, neither in school, nor in college has anyone told me about lifelong learning or development". For younger respondents, it seems that the concept of lifelong learning might have been mentioned at school. The participant (female, aged 25): "I had a good teacher who set my expectations right". The other (male, aged 29): "To just a moderate extent. I believe that it is a matter of self-sufficiency and the wishes of each person". It may depend a lot on teachers, and not so much on an official policy of schools today. According to another respondent (female, aged 23): "Not really, the school made me think that after graduating there is nothing more to learn and that someone's final purpose is to find a job". In case of some respondents, although the school had not helped them develop this attitude, they did it on their own as a part of their development. The interviewee (female, aged 44) stated: "School did not help. I understood this in my adult life, when I realized that the way we learn changes from one phase of life to another and by understanding the fact that, in certain periods, we are models (positive or negative) for our children". Another (female, aged 54) declared: "No, school has not prepared me for this, but I was foreseeing that things would evolve so that we would have to continue learning. The key is to make learning a pleasure, not an obligation". "The formal education has not helped me understand that learning does not end when one finishes school and that we are the most

faithful teachers for ourselves" – another interviewee stated (female, aged 47).

Based on the research results described above, it may be concluded that the system of formal education in Romania does not support people in their preparation for lifelong learning. Students have to learn on their own that this is the key for their development. In case of younger generations, explaining the concept of lifelong learning is the choice of a particular teacher, but no systemic efforts are made to prepare students for a continuous learning once the school is over. As the online education has never been mentioned, one cannot infer that the school education system is even aware that students can be supported by online classes.

CHAPTER II

SPECIFICS OF ADULT
ONLINE LEARNING

In this chapter we reflect on the specifics of online education, elaborate on people's needs and preferences in the context of learning, and point out what factors and conditions should occur to ensure that the adults will learn effectively in digital environment. We present the analysis of the adult online education situation in the project's partner countries based on statistical data, literature dedicated to this problem and results of the research that have been conducted by project's partners for the purpose of the Learning Circles in Libraries project. We elaborate on the collected data and conclusions taking into account possible needs and demands of future Learning Circles organisers, facilitators and users.

For the purpose of this document we propose to define the term 'adults' online education' as any kind of learning activities or opportunities that are:

- provided in non-formal settings or environment, e.g. through libraries or NGOs;
- addressed to adults (persons 18+), professionally active;
- undertaken with the purpose of developing someone's competences and not for a degree;
- conducted with the use of digital tools, e.g. e-learning courses, video blogs, tutorials, applications and other platforms that enable learning at scale.

While elaborating on the adult education status quos in the project's partner countries and discussing policies or research findings we used the terms: 'online education', 'online learning', 'digital learning' and 'e-learning' simultaneously throughout this document, although originally they had slightly different meaning. Our purpose was to ensure possible coherence of the White Paper content, the task being a challenge due to great differentiation of the data, policies and overall situation of adult education in the project's partner countries. The huge development of the whole area of online learning and teaching in recent years – a great variety of tools, continuously changing ways of communication, habits of learners, mobile technology etc. – was also a significant factor.

Similarly, while referring to issues regarding 'non-online' education, the terms: 'offline education', 'face-to-face' education', 'stationary education' (or learning) were used.

HOW DO THE ADULTS LEARN ONLINE?

Relatively new form of online education are large-scale, technology-mediated learning environments with many learners and few experts to guide them. They can be offered in various forms, such as:

- Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs);
- intelligent tutoring systems;
- open learning courseware, learning games;
- citizen science communities;
- collaborative programming communities (such as Scratch), community tutorial systems (such as StackOverflow);
- shared critique communities (such as DeviantArt);
- and the countless informal communities of learners.

These systems either depend upon large numbers

of learners, or they are enriched through the data previously used by many learners. They share a common purpose – to increase human potential and a common infrastructure of data and computation to enable learning at scale. (Source: Learning @ Scale, 2019).

It is believed that critical thinking, metacognition, verbal communication and self leadership are among the crucial skills for the 21st century:

1. Critical Thinking - using logic and evidence to make decisions and judgements.
2. Metacognition - understanding and being able to influence one's own thought processes.
3. Verbal Communication - verbally communicating and articulating in a clear and effective manner for any given target audience.
4. Self Leadership - effectively prioritizing and organizing time, tasks and projects.
5. Resilience - persevering and keeping motivated despite challenges.

Five habits of mind

In the era of fake news critical thinking seems to be the particularly important competence and challenge for information users. But how many adult learners have ever had a chance to experience a type of education that would emphasize questioning data and independent thinking? How many teachers struggled to maintain a healthy level of skepticism among their pupils? Usually teachers were more interested in what we knew (remember tests and exams?) than what we did not. Deborah Meier (Meier, 2009) created a radical model for a school designed to foster inquiry. She wanted her students to become critical thinkers and problem solvers, which was what democratic society needed. She believed that the students should develop the 'habit' of learning and questioning, that knowledge cannot be force-fed to them. Meier developed

five learning skills, or habits of mind. Each habit corresponds with a question:

1. Evidence: How do we know what is true or false? What evidence counts?
2. Viewpoint: How might this look if we stepped into another person's shoes, or looked at it from a different point of view?
3. Connection: Is there a pattern? Have we seen something like this before?
4. Conjecture: What if it were different?
5. Relevance: Why does this matter?

The same set of questions might help adults not only learn online more proactively, but also select content they want to learn. Therefore one of crucial features of the good online learning content is clear navigation and structure that allows a user to quickly answer "What's in this for me? (WITFM)' question. Some e-learning courses have built-in tools and strategies that encourage the learner to get to know their structure.

Yes, I can: chunking

To build and sustain engagement among the online course participants it is necessary to:

- trigger interest;
- keep the participants engaged;
- reinforce the participants' belief that they can perform specific tasks.

It is true that the participants are in control over their learning process when they can see clearly the overall educational goals and long term results. In order to sustain engagement of self-learners it is necessary to appreciate small steps leading to the final goals. This is why it is crucial to split the content into smaller, meaningful portions (chunks), in such a way that the participant can see the progress immediately. *There are three straightforward sides to chunking processes – the search for chunks, the noticing and memorizing of those chunks, and the use of*

the chunks we have already built up. The main purpose of consciousness is to search for and discover these structured chunks of information within working memory, so that they can then be used efficiently and automatically, with minimal further input from consciousness. Daniel Bor (Bor, 2012).

In addition to reducing the cognitive load, chunking also provides meaning and context to the information, making it easier to remember.

Fostering motivation

There are a lot of theories on motivation in scientific literature, but one of them is worth mentioning because of its application to online education. Self Determination Theory (SDT) is perceived as the most useful theory about human behaviour and learning. It was developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan from the University of Rochester over 30 years ago and explained why individual learning experiences succeeded or failed, as well as how to support learners in their efforts. SDT is based on the well known distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, and points out that all 'intrinsic' factors are closer to 'self-determined' whereas 'extrinsic' – to non-self-determined. Intrinsic motivation happens when people do something because they want to, they find it – in itself – interesting and satisfying. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, appears when people do something to achieve external goals, e.g. pass an exam, gain a badge, win points. Between pure intrinsic and pure extrinsic motivations there is a continuum in which one can find e.g. motivation based on finding that something is not very interesting, but acceptable, and – seeing additional, individual profits – one takes up that activity ("I am not a fan of finance management but I know that knowledge of it will improve my general managerial skills and I will feel better as a manager"). Both kinds of motivation have an influence on people, although the intrinsic one is more powerful than the extrinsic. And, to some extent, the external motivators, such as rewards, points, exams, could have negative effect on people's performance and on their intrinsic motivation in the long run. This is because the learners will get used to be driven by external motivators, and in case they disappear, people may not be able to motivate themselves. According to the SDT, there are three parameters that affect our motivation and – as a result – our behaviour: autonomy, competence and relatedness.

- Autonomy – is the perceived as an ability to control freely one's own actions;
- Competence – it means that we are rewarded by our brains when we learn something that might be useful for us in the future;
- Relatedness – it indicates that humans are social beings who are rewarded by their brains for interacting with, feeling connected with, and caring for other humans.

All three parameters do not need to be present at the same time and in equal amounts. Anyway, it is crucial to ensure that everyone will have a chance to benefit from all three parameters in relatively short time. This theory may help to understand – and sometimes to verify – some popular recommendations, especially easy to find on the internet, at some more or less credible sites. Below you can find some practical inputs that could make e-learning process more motivating for learners. It is not a complete list, but can be

used as a direct advice or a kind of inspiration.

Autonomy and e-learning
People want to know and have sense of independence and influence on their lives, and also on their education. Let them feel this, to a possible extent.

Competence and e-learning
People want to feel they are competent. But they want also to feel that they are becoming more and more competent. It is important to give them the chance to feel both.

Relatedness and e-learning
People are humans and relations with others are meaningful for them, also in the process of learning. E-learning gives a chance to avoid interactions with other people but one must realize that it influences – in a negative way – the level of motivation. To boost motivation some online courses offer the participants additional opportunities such as:
- a certificate of completion;
- small grants to implement the projects that have been created during the course;
- feedback provided by course instructors and peers;
- meeting in person for all participants and tutors.

The role of the instructor is crucial: to encourage the participants so that they follow the course schedule, interact with others, submit tasks and answer various open-ended questions and quizzes. The instructor should build the participants' motivation with the use of various communication tools. They may vary depending on the participants' learning preferences:

Individual/ Solitary Learning

prefers: self-study, takes his/her responsibility for learning
instructional media and materials: asynchronous learning activities that need discussion, creativity, exploration and research (forum, blog, wiki).
instructional methods: case studies, problem-based learning and storytelling

Social/ Collaborative Learning
prefers: group work, enjoys chat, thinks that learning is the common responsibility of the instructor and learner
instructional media and materials: synchronous learning activities like audio and video conferencing, virtual classroom, social media, chat
instructional methods: cooperative learning and role-playing

Auditory Learning
prefers: listening, loves to hear about other people's experiences
instructional media and materials: audio materials like podcasts of sample cases and scenarios, narrated tutorials
instructional methods: direct instruction, lecture, case studies

Visual Learning
prefers: watching, thinks that he/she learns best by 'seeing'
instructional media and materials: visual materials like videocasts, video visuals of sample cases and scenarios, simulations, graphic organisers, maps, charts
instructional methods: demonstration and presentation

Concrete Learning
prefers: hands-on activities, thinks that he/she learns best by 'doing'
instructional media and materials:

interactive experiences like simulations and games, activities that need discussion, creativity, exploration and research
instructional methods: discovery learning and problem-based learning

Abstract Learning

prefers: reading, expresses herself/ himself orally or in writing very well
instructional media and materials: printed materials like books, hand-outs, worksheets, puzzles, and newspapers
instructional methods: storytelling, discussion and presentation

Logical Learning

prefers: thinking in details, prefers studying step by step with the guidance of a plan
instructional media and materials: real-life experiences (hierarchical), linear instruction
instructional methods: discussion, brainstorming and critical analysis of real-world situations

Sensual Learning

prefers: feeling, dislikes planning her/his own learning process by others likes being provided with various resources and choices
instructional media and materials: creative experiences (random), rich learning objects
instructional methods: role-playing, case studies and storytelling

What demotivates adults to learn?

The overall learning experience should be designed in such a way that the learner is at the centre of the development, methodology, process and outcomes of learning offerings. Which is not always the case. The biggest dealbreakers are:

- poor user experience;
- too complex technical solutions

and low quality content.
People can feel discouraged if they lack basic digital skills. If this is the case, they might struggle with the platform functionalities and navigation and, finally, abandon the idea of learning online.

ADULT ONLINE EDUCATION IN THE PROJECT'S PARTNERS COUNTRIES (DATA ANALYSIS)

E-learning is not a new phenomenon in educational landscape, but its popularity is nowadays expanding exponentially, due to growing technical and methodological possibilities and rising awareness of its numerous advantages. Data shows that size of the e-learning market was over 165 billion dollars in 2015 and is expected to exceed 240 billion in 2023. What is interesting, self-paced online education is retracting: its value is close to 50 billion, but it is steadily dropping by approx. 6% yearly. There is no credible data for the markets of all the Learning Circles in Libraries project partner countries, but most of us are not in the vanguard: the value of (only) self-paced e-learning market in Eastern Europe is just over 1 billion, so – looking at quantity of inhabitant and economic indicators – there is still space for the gap to be filled. Nonetheless, the data shown above is a result of development in two sectors: corporate and academic. Impact of informal education, executed by local public institutions like libraries or museums on those financial indicators is negligible. Distance between those two sectors and the 'public' one is so huge that cross-cutting research on e-learning very rarely touch the latter one. Popularity of the adult online education among the Europeans, and in the project's partner countries differs considerably. For example, in Finland online learning is widely practiced. Internet is considered as enabling multiple

learning opportunities for adult learners and ensuring flexibility when it comes to time and location of studying. Learning online is possible also alongside the work-related activities as adult learners are able to plan their schedules more freely. Learners consider online learning as a good method of studying, although at times, they perceive online learning as a lonely experience (Rauma, 2016). In Germany, online learning opportunities are widely available in universities, althought the sector still faces challenges. The survey on digital learning called *Monitor Digitale Bildung* points out: "The technology and infrastructure for digital learning at German universities received good ratings from all those surveyed. However, the educational potential of digitalisation often remains untapped. Lectures supplemented with educational videos or presentation tools are not uncommon, but there is far less use of social media or of innovative formats such as collaborative flipped-classroom models" (Bertelsmann Stiftung, ed., 2017, p. 51). The vocational education and training system, also known as the dual training system ('Duale Berufsausbildung') in Germany, faces similar challenges as the other educational sectors. The report mentions the task of "meshing the course content offered by the schools with that of the companies that take on apprentices", which should be given more attention (Bertelsmann Stiftung, ed., 2016, p. 40). Non-formal, not-for-the-job e-learning (and e-learning as a whole) is not very popular in Poland. According to research conducted in 2017, only 26% of all respondents have taken up any educational activity to which they were not obliged by an employer or a school. And most of them (18%) – in sport area. What is crucial in the context of Learning Circles – only 4% respondents chose e-learning as a form of

learning. The reason is unknown – maybe it was a choice of learners who did not want to participate in online education, maybe there was no relevant e-learning content. In any case the result shows that 'culture of e-learning', especially in non-formal education, in Poland is weak. It may be assumed that doing an online course is among the least popular activities online in Europe. It is relatively widespread in Sweden and Finland with 18% and 17% of internet users participating in these in 2017, but in Poland only a handful of people actually engage in online learning for personal or professional purposes.

According to *Digital Economy and Society Index Report 2019*:

1. Only 1.51% of individuals in Poland (16-74 years old) with a low education background (having maximum primary or lower secondary education) engaged in online learning (EU average: 2.83% for this group).

2. Only 2.57% of individuals (16-74 years old) living in a household with the lowest income (among the 25% lowest income observed) undertook an online course (EU average: 5.03% for this group).

3. Only 1.59% of individuals (16-74 years old) living in rural areas undertook an online course in any subject. (EU average: 5.35% for this group).

The data can be analysed taking into account the so called 'disadvantage factors', which are defined by the EU as the 3 following characteristics:

- the 55-74 year olds;
- people with a low level of education;
- individuals who are unemployed, inactive or retired.

1.08% of individuals affected by at least one disadvantage factor (EU average:

2.58%) would engage in online learning, and only 0.281% for those with at least 2 disadvantage factors (EU average: 1.07%). 25.2% of individuals (16-74 year old) have not used the internet during the last 3 months and have no digital skills at all. 28.5% of

individuals who used the internet has low digital skills (without basic skills in at least one of the four Digital Competences included in the index: information, communication, content-creation and problem-solving). 62.3% of internet users in Poland have basic or

2a1 At leastBasic Digital Skills All Individuals (aged 16-74)

European Commission, Digital Scoreboard
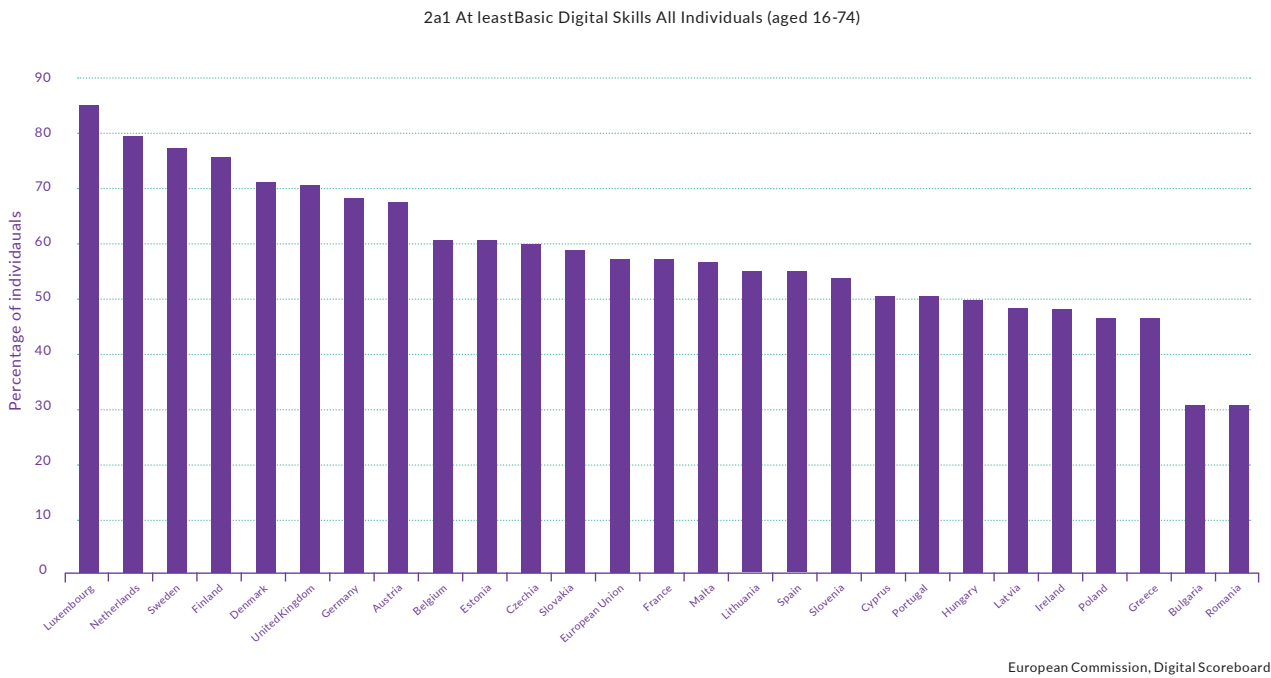
Table 3. Source: DESI

above basic digital skills (EU average is 70,9%). Access to computer and internet at home is another important factor that influence the readiness of adult learners in Poland to online education. Lack of need or interest, insufficient skills and cost-related barriers are the most common reasons for not having internet access at home. Sadly, Poland is in very last place when it comes to information processing skills. This area refers to the ability to identify, locate, retrieve, store, organise and analyse digital information, judging its relevance and purpose. The indicator is based on five activities internet users have been able to do online during the previous 3 months. It is worth pointing out that digital skills are key to combat digital exclusion and to tap

the potential of informal online education. The social gap that occurs in the area of both traditional 'face-to-face' forms of education and e-learning is also an important question. This issue was covered in the Adult Education Survey conducted in Germany in 2016. The Survey's findings revealed that the unemployed, people out of work and low-qualified people did not take part in digital learning activities (as part of non-formal continuing education/training) as often as people in work and those who were highly qualified; for this and for more details on different groups of people see *Weiterbildungsverhalten in Deutschland 2016, 2017*, p. 249. The percentage given for the unemployed is 13%, which is a significantly lower rate than the 23% average participation in digital non-formal education and training.

After all, non-formal continuing education and training at the workplace is a form of learning to which the unemployed do not have access. The social gap that has been described for digital non-formal continuing education and training is also visible in *Monitor Digitale Bildung*. It must be pointed out, however, that the percentages given in *Weiterbildungsverhalten in Deutschland 2016, 2017*, p. 249, refer to non-formal continuing education and training, whereas the percentages given in *Monitor Digitale Bildung* (Bertelsmann Stiftung, ed., 2018, p. 26) refer to digital learning in the field of 'Weiterbildung' in general. Moreover, apprentices or university students surveyed for the other Monitor surveys conducted by the Bertelsmann Stiftung were not included in the Monitor dealing with 'Weiterbildung', whereas elderly people were included. But although percentages differ according to the design of the surveys, the findings on adult online learning reflect similar trends.

The *Monitor Digitale Bildung* (Bertelsmann Stiftung, ed., 2018, p. 62) sums it up: "Individuals with less formal education and those who are unemployed participate much less in digital learning. The social gap in continuing education that has been repeatedly identified in formal non-digital continuing education offer is also present in the digital sphere. Furthermore, teachers and administrators largely hold the view that digital learning primarily facilitates self-directed learning and the advancement of high-performing participants. Only one third of teachers and 35 percent of administrators expect advantages for less effective participants or heterogeneous learning groups".

The majority of experts from the continuing education sector who were asked for their opinion for the *Monitor Digitale Bildung*, thought that digital learning has the potential to help people overcome barriers. However, they differentiated between groups of underprivileged people; they held the view that people with physical disabilities, people living in rural areas and refugees benefit more from using digital media than socially disadvantaged persons (cf. Bertelsmann Stiftung, ed., 2018, p. 28). An interesting and important information comes from research done by UK Department of Education in 2017. This one could indicate common human approach to e-learning. Respondents were asked about factors which would make them more likely to take up additional form of learning. Chance to attend online education (fully or partly) would be significant only for 4% of respondents. It implies real challenge – how to attract participants to attend Learning Circles if there is no 'trend' to learn non-formally, especially in the form of distance learning? In this publication we have made an attempt to find answers to few questions:

- Why do the adults choose/skip online learning? What do they like about online education? What do they consider as a barrier?
- What are specific skills the adults should have to use online learning effectively? What kind of skills do they consider as necessary? What helped them to use online education effectively?
- What makes the adults motivated to use online education and complete courses/achieve expected results, and what makes them to drop out?

The data for Poland – unless specified otherwise – comes from the research conducted among digitally active people, who used computers and internet – which means, they were technically

able to take up e-learning courses. The study was carried out for the purpose of the Learning Circles in Libraries project. An online questionnaire was sent to a few hundred people who represented various age groups and backgrounds, and disseminated through the websites and social media channels managed by the FRSI (the Polish project's partner). This research, under the name of Glares and Shadows of the e-Learning, is not a representative study. However, the results are quite comparable to other research findings achieved in different countries, so one could approach these results with some level of trust. According to German perspective, it is the formal educational system that is supposed to enable people to develop learning strategies – also in the area of online learning – and to prepare the ground for lifelong learning.

WHY DO THE ADULTS CHOOSE/SKIP ONLINE LEARNING? WHAT DO THEY LIKE ABOUT ONLINE EDUCATION, WHAT DO THEY CONSIDER AS A BARRIER?

This unit helps to understand why people are willing to take up e-learning and, on the other hand, why they do not want to.

What does attract people to e-learning?

The strongest factor that attracts people to take up e-learning is similar to what makes them learn in a traditional way. According to one of the 'factors' models' (Rosli et al., 2016) it is a factor of exposure (the rest of them being: technology, content and social influence). It means, in other words, that people take up e-learning when they are obliged to. This research was conducted amongst students, but similar results have been achieved in research on corporate e-learning and education – the main reason for taking up e-learning activities is 'vocational purposes' or supervisor's demand or a suggestion. As for

corporate education – an interesting fact is a decision-making process: in only 14% of entities the employee (the future participant) has decided about his or her education (source: EY Academy of Business). One should not extrapolate these results to non-formal education. In this case the participants are not 'obliged' to anything, and should be attracted in other ways. According to Polish research *Glares and Shadows of the e-Learning*, for the majority of people who had taken up online courses in previous 12 months, the main reason was "it would be helpful in my job, but I chose the course on my own" (80%). Other reasons ("business requirement", "interesting advertisement" or "colleague's recommendation") were checked occasionally. Another question, asked to people, who had their former experience with e-learning (longer than 1 year ago) but were not active e-learners any more was: "What would make you take up an online course?" There were several options available to choose from – most participants have chosen three of them: "if the course was useful in my job", "if the course helped me develop my hobby" and "if the course was free of charge".

What would make you take up an online course?

Subject of the course, possibility of learning without leaving home in every moment I want.
(citation from the research Glares and Shadows of the e-learning)

What do you perceive as strengths of e-learning?

I am able to return to interesting materials anytime I want and can.
(citation from the research Glares and Shadows of the e-learning)

Table 1. What would make you take up an online course?	
Responses	**%**
Usefulness in my job	75%
Development of my hobby	75%
Free of charge	75%
Perception of the benefits	50%
More (free) time for education	16%
Business demand	16%
Number of respondents: 6 (take it into consideration)	
Respondents were allowed to check all that applied.	

What do you perceive as strengths of e-learning?

It is available every moment of a day, usually it is free, focused on the up-to-date solutions that are unreachable on in-person trainings. (citation from the research *Glares and Shadows of the e-learning*)

The more complex research was conducted in the US by Song D. and Bonk C.J. (2016, Song, D., & Bonk, C. J.). It was also about motivation that lead to take up an online course. Users of 340 educational websites in the US were asked about their motivation toward e-learning courses they have taken. Answers are shown in the table below.

Table 2. Motivational reasons for self-directed informal learning	
Responses	**%**
Interest in the topic	97,1%
Curiosity	88,1%
Need for some information	73.8%
Choice or freedom to select the topic or resources	67.9%
Goals for self-improvement	61.9%
I just want to learn something new	60.7%
Professional growth (job related)	57.1%
Feeling of personal control over my own learning	56%
Hobbies	38.1%
The website or activity looks exciting	36.9%
Personally felt need for new skills	32.1%
Make a contribution to society	26.2%
Participate in particular activity, resource, or event	23.8%
Respondents: 84	
Respondents were allowed to check all that applied.	

What made you take up your last online course?

It was quite cheap and I could adjust my education to my own schedule.
(citation from the research *Glares and Shadows of the e-learning*)

For the purpose of the Learning Circles in Libraries Fundatia Progress – the project the project's partner from Romania – has conducted interviews with persons who represented various age groups and backgrounds. The survey contained questions about the reasons why adult people choose online learning. A female interviewee (aged 53) stated that in

her area there were no available 'face-to-face' courses. At the same time, the larger offer, the accessibility, the fact that the online courses were free of charge and a large variety of methods were used in them were important factors. A male (aged 29) thought that online courses "offered better facilities, like the access to a virtual machine, on which you have installed all the utilities needed for the course, without needing a software license which may be expensive - the courses have a good structure and are well organised if one needs a certification". Another female (aged 62) was choosing online courses in order to be in line with the requirements from the industrial automatization processes. One more (female, aged 44) accessed online courses out of curiosity, "because they offer an easy access to areas, themes, course curricula, methods and styles of learning; the possibility of practicing (even passive practice) of a foreign language; access to technology combined with time". Another interviewee (female, aged 47) thought that an online course offered you more freedom, "the possibility to learn in your own rhythm. At the same time, people who are more shy, more emotional, less sociable may lose some of their discomfort due to their fear of rejection, fear of failure or fear of making mistakes or other types of fears which cannot be neglected". As we can see from the sample opinions above, respondents prefer online course for the themes that may not be suitable for face-to-face delivery, for liberty and flexibility of both curricula, for methods as well as for reasons connected to personal factors – it seems that online courses may be better suited for the introverts. According to Finnish literature dedicated to the subject of online education, fluent interaction, group-oriented learning tasks, studying skills and motivation are cited as main factors that promote collaborative learning in virtual learning

spaces. Also, a positive and supportive group atmosphere is an important factor. Educator's role in supporting the students during the learning process is essential, too (Vuopala, 2013). Also, linking learning content to what is expected in everyday life seems to be a good concept for all sorts of learning activities, including online education. It means taking into account the challenges individuals are confronted with in their lives. Authors of studies elaborated in Portugal point out that online students have a different profile comparing to face-to-face students because they have family and work-related responsibilities. Moreover, the adults who are becoming students again, have, in most cases, experienced a break of several years (Neves, n.d.). Being an online student requires much more than a simple access to computers and internet. First of all, it is a willingness to learn, an ability to communicate and express himself – differently than in 'face-to-face' environment. It also requires using technology in a way in which the roles of students and teachers are far from what happens in an ordinary classroom. Portuguese research list several factors that motivate the adults to look for online courses in contrast to 'face-to-face' learning. They are usually related to flexibility offered by online courses, which can be of a geographical, family, professional or financial nature, although there are more and more reasons expressed by students who have had previous experiences on e-learning.

Possible motivations for an adult to seek online education / training	
Geographical and mobility	The adults live in isolated areas of great urban centers without institutional structures that would allow them to start or continue their studies. The adults live outside their country of origin, intend to start or continue their studies, but prefer to do so in an institution of their origin. The adults have a special interest in taking up a course at a foreign teaching or training institution without leaving their country of origin. The adults suffer from a physical or other disability that does not allow them to absent themselves frequently or for a long periods of time from their places of living.
Relatives	The adults can not absent themselves frequently or for a long period of time from their places of living because they have obligations (e.g. they care for family members and third parties).
Professionals	The adults have professional commitments whose schedules are incompatible with the frequency of teaching or 'face-to-face' training.
Financial	Online courses, although they do not require a large financial investment, are less expensive for institutions that offer them than 'face-to-face' courses (lower costs of real estate, electricity, human resources). On the other hand, much of the material needed by students is also provided online. These characteristics make the cost of a course reasonably lower for the students who attend them, a variable added to the added value of not requiring frequent trips.

Source: Neves, A. (n.d.)

The percentage of respondents who experienced and/or attended online courses was very small (6 out of 20). Only one gave up the online course because they were told that it was free and it turned out that it was not.

6 respondents who attended online courses said that what led them to choose online learning and what they liked about these courses was that they did not have to move, but they could stay at work or at home while learning.

WHAT DISCOURAGES PEOPLE FROM E-LEARNING?

One of the largest barriers that keep people away from e-learning could be a belief that the online education is not as effective as the 'offline', traditional education. There is a report of Ernst&Young Academy of Business that conducted a survey amongst Polish managers responsible for L&D (Learning and Development) units in their companies.

86% of them thought their employees preferred offline learning than online one. Although there is no sufficient data that would confirm this hypothesis in relation to non-formal learning, there is a probability that no significant differences occur between those sectors. Additional barrier, mentioned by Ajay Kumar Attri (Attri, 2012), is a low status of institutions that offer distance education. If a course is published at a renowned university website, it could be perceived as a credible source of information, but what if the provider is not so well known? Who is responsible not only for the quality, but even for reliability and correctness of the content? As for Learning Circles – it is a library and librarians who will take responsibility and will authorize the quality of the e-learning offer. In Polish research *Glares and Shadows of the e-learning* there were only two respondents who claimed they had taken up an online

course more than one year ago and after that experience they decided not to do it again. The first one did no answer the 'why' question at all, the second one answered that online education is "impractical and there was a difficult contact with the teacher". So it is impossible to conclude about main barriers that discourage people from taking up online education.

What is the reason why you will not return to online education?
Online courses are impractical and there is a difficult contact with the teacher.
(citation from the research *Glares and Shadows of the e-learning*)

What do you perceive as a weakness of e-learning?
It is necessary to be strongly motivated and determined; in-person courses impose a certain rigour and regularity. Here you have to take care of it personally.
(citation from the research *Glares and Shadows of the e-learning*)

The lack of contact with a teacher was also mentioned as a barrier by those respondents who were active e-learners, although this was not an issue that would stop them from taking up online classes.

In general, research did not reveal any real barriers that would keep people off the e-learning activities. But it is worth remembering that the research was conducted online so people who did not use internet were excluded from it.

The probably only one research on that topic in Poland was conducted in 2013. Krzysztof Dobosz (2013, Dobosz) listed few categories of barriers which could keep people away

of e-learning. Four of them are especially important in the context of Learning Circles:

- Technology barrier (appears when people do not have computer skills that are needed to learn online);
- Mental barrier (occurs when people do not believe they are able to cope with technological tools, such as an application or a computer program);
- Language barrier (refers to the e-learning content that is available in foreign languages);
- Lack of a direct contact with a tutor and other students.

According to Portuguese studies (Neves, n.d.) the fact that many courses are expensive and also, that they do not require a rigid schedule, is considered a barrier. The lack of physical presence of colleagues and the teacher was also regarded as an obstacle. Respondents who have never attended an online course, when asked the same question said practically the same. The biggest impediment to taking an online course would be the lack of mandatory schedules and the lack of physical presence of people to ask questions at the time. Some said that the lack of technological skills would also be a barrier to participation in e-learning.

In Finland, communication in foreign language and passive group members were listed among the most significant hindering factors for online learners (Vuopala, 2013). Lehtinen, J. (2015) quotes Koli and Silander (2002) and points out that a chaotic experience of learning process such as an unclear picture of the stages and progress of learning also hinders the learning experience. Anttila, Juvonen & Parikka (2011) state in *Verkko-opetuksen hyvät käytänteet* (The Guide

to Good Online Teaching Practices) that well-made and versatile educational materials can inspire even a reluctant student. However, when using multiple online tools, it is worth using common sense, because they can also cause the feeling of overload. By carefully designing the learning environment and using appropriately selected tools, one can significantly increase student motivation.

WHAT ARE SPECIFIC SKILLS THE ADULTS SHOULD HAVE TO USE ONLINE LEARNING EFFECTIVELY? WHAT SKILLS DO THEY CONSIDER AS NECESSARY? WHAT HELPED THEM TO USE ONLINE EDUCATION EFFECTIVELY?

There is a set of participants' skills and attitudes that are required to be a 'good user of e-learning'. It does not mean that some level of the expertise is required, but one should be able to use a computer (or another device), browsers and, from time to time, be able to install a kind of software (eg. pdf files reader, a plug-in and so on).

Computer literacy is the easier part and can be acquired relatively fast. The more substantial factor is the participants' attitude to learning in general, and to delivering their projects – because being an attendee in an online course is a kind of a project. Thus, is he or she good at time management? Is he or she goal-driven? Is he or she disciplined?

In Polish *Glares and Shadows of the e-learning* survey those assumptions have been verified. All respondents were asked for self-evaluation of their competences in six categories, all 'how good am I at': learning, time management, project management, self-determination, computer and internet skills. The results show that people who have taken up an online course in the last

12 months were pretty more competent (or – rather – declared stronger competences) in every category, especially in the ability to learn (3.77 vs. 4.25 on five-point scale) and computer literacy (4.6 vs. 4.0). Answers to other questions did not reveal such differences. Generally, average value of all questions for people who were 'e-learning active' was 4.1 and for the 'e-learning inactive' – 3.75. If those results were confirmed in a quantitate, representative study, the findings might be significant. To get deeper into the subject of competences that are important in e-learning, the research compared two variables – self-assessment of competences and age of respondents. In fact, there were only two age groups – people between 26 a 40 years and people between 41 and 55, that took part in the research. And the results revealed that there were practically no differences in self-assessment, with small offset to the younger ones as a 'more competent'. Only two representatives of the oldest cohort, people over 55, participated in the research, but – suprisingly – they reached the highest result in the 'self-determination'category.

There are no significant differences in the participants' responses, taking into account their place of living (rural areas, small towns, bigger cities).

The research also showed that the differences in levels of competences between people who did online courses and who did not was not big. The conclusion is that the Learning Circles facilitators do not have to perceive level of competences as a potential barrier for the participants.

In online studies in Finland the learner's own learning process is considered a central element which needs to be systematically guided and reflected on. A student should have a sense of mastery in his or her own learning process. It is vital that an online learner accepts his or her role as an active participant in the learning process. Skills of learning to learn are emphasized. The use of online learning environments requires self-discipline, self-guidance and commitment as well as a positive attitude toward online learning. It also requires a basic knowledge of how to search and process information as well as computational skills. In online learning, student's own activity and systematic work are the key factors (Lehtinen, 2015).

In general, more activity is required from an online student than from a participant in the classroom. The learner is 'socially' present online when he or she expresses or writes his or her thoughts as comments (Opintopolku. fi, 2019). Just 'sitting in front of the computer' is not enough. Online presence is created through interaction with other participants.

Cooperation and co-creation skills are a prerequisite for success in group assignments in online learning. Lehtinen (2015) quotes Koli and Silander (2002) and points out that other skills needed for online learning include technical skills, information retrieval, data processing skills, writing and project management skills as well as interpersonal and emotional skills.

Similarly, the authors of Portuguese studies point out that the fundamental factors in the area of learning online are self-motivation and self-discipline; the freedom and flexibility of online education also require responsibility. The student should have an open mind and be able to share information. Equally important are the skills of communication, particularly

writing, because in virtual classrooms students usually communicate in written form.

Good management of online content is another demanded skill, as well as respect for the content and its sources, searching, producing and distributing digital information. A specific attitude is also needed: a belief that online learning can also happen outside the physical classroom, and that the role of the teacher is mainly a facilitator rather than a mere transmitter of information (Neves, n.d.).

In the document *Modelo Pedagógico Virtual da Universidade Aberta* (Virtual Pedagogical Model of the Aberta University), it is intended that, as a student, the learner will master the characteristics of the online environment, acquire diverse competences that help him, or her, complete online learning courses with success. Therefore, students should acquire:

- Skills in the use of the technological resources available in this online environment (know-how);

- Confidence in different ways of communication available in this online environment (know-how), namely an asynchronous communication;

- Competences in various types of learning and working online;

- Self-learning, collaborative learning, resource-based learning;

- General skills of the internet use (communication, research, management and evaluation of information) and the online environment where the course will take place: knowing of how to use communication tools, how to work in groups online, how to do research and verify information;

- Rules of social coexistence specific to communication in online environments (knowing how to relate).

Almost all respondents, regardless of whether they attended an online course or did not mentioned that the core competences required for attending an online course would be self-motivation, self-discipline, commitment, personal organisational skills and technology skills. Language skills have also been mentioned, since many of these courses (especially in certain areas) are in English.

The Portuguese study also revealed that according to teachers students had insufficient basic skills related to the use of the necessary technologies (for example how to attach, download or save documents, or install a required software) at the beginning of online courses. Students, in turn, evaluated themselves as sufficiently competent in the use of technologies. The main difficulties pointed out by online students were essentially a lack of effective time management (also acknowledged by the trainers and teachers) and a perceived difficulty in understanding the expectations teachers had of them, something that students explained by the absence of non-verbal cues (Neves, n.d.).

In terms of time management, students and teachers agreed that online courses were not for everyone and that applicants should do a clear and honest assessment of their interests, skills and level of commitment they were willing to undertake.

Several studies pointed out that before students start an online course in an institution, they need introductory courses that will prepare them to what is expected of them and introduce them to institutional models, because attending a 'face-to-face' university which

offers some online courses is different to using an educational offer that is entirely online.

WHAT DOES MOTIVATE LEARNERS TO USE ONLINE EDUCATION AND COMPLETE COURSES, OR ACHIEVE EXPECTED RESULTS? WHAT DOES MAKE THEM DROP OUT?

This unit is dedicated to factors that make the e-learning attractive (or not) to participants. It is not about creating content of a specific course, but about designing 'e-learning experience', so all recommendations may be applicable to most forms of online education. To sum up all issues that refer to motivation, it is worth mentioning the conclusions of survey conducted amongst 144 participants of Learning Circles that operated in 6 libraries in the USA and one in Kenya (Fellows, 2018). According to the results of the survey, "learners attributed their successes to both internal and external factors. Roughly one-third of respondents credited themselves for their success, citing a personal drive to succeed. The remaining comments from respondents were fairly equally divided into three success factors themes: the facilitator, social support from peers, and the exchange of ideas during group discussion. Only a small proportion of people (less than ten percent) attributed their success to their interest in the MOOCs' subject matter" (Learning about Learning Circles, 2018). The conclusion is that the subject of study may not be as important as other factors. Why? A hypothesis to verify: for many people non-formal education is not a goal in itself, but it is only a kind of a pretext to meet other people, share experiences and be taken care of by some 'leaders'. And these aspects are more important than the content. If this is the case, it might be convenient due to a limited

choice of courses that may be included in the Learning Circles programme in Poland (e-learning offer is not very rich and the quality of part of it may be low). Most efforts should be put into building relations and atmosphere as well as elaborating on how to implement new knowledge in the participants' lives. On the other hand, the results of the research *Glares and Shadows of the e-learning* show that the subject matter is quite important. For almost 80% respondents the crucial reason to take up an online course was "it may be useful in my job". However, the research question was about 'plain' e-learning, while the Learning Circles have their own specifics, but it is worth attending to the choice of courses, anyway. It should be also taken into account that the usual advantages of e-learning will not be applicable in that form of education. In the research respondents were asked about main advantages of online education. The most often chosen responses were those referring to flexibility of time and place, which does not apply to Learning Circles. The other upsizes are more achievable – proper topics, specified educational goals, free of charge.

Table 3. Summary of open question about advantages of online course respondents have taken up in last 12 months (categorized)	
Responses	**%**
Flexibility of learning time	45%
Flexibility of learning place	35%
Individual pace of learning	30%
Free of charge	15%
Relevant (needed) topics/goals	10%
Respondents: 20	
Respondents were allowed to write down all that apply	

German studies on adult education in general also shows that the motivational structure can be complex; people may be motivated not only by the wish to learn, but also by the wish to get to know other people, to do something which is different from their daily routines and so on (cf. Brüning, Kuwan, 2002, p. 26). When asked why they took part in non-formal education/training activities (multiple answers possible), more than 50% of those surveyed in Germany for the *Adult Education Survey* in 2016 stated that they did it in order to be better able to carry out their occupational activities ("um meine berufliche Tätigkeit besser ausüben zu können"). People seem to be aware that in the 21st century it is necessary to adapt to new job requirements and to be prepared to keep learning throughout their careers.

More than 30% stated they did it because they wanted to expand their knowledge/ their skills concerning a topic which interested them *(Weiterbildungsverhalten in Deutschland*

2016, 2017, p. 119–120, and Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, ed., 2016, p. 39).

In the survey *Monitor Digitale Bildung* that monitored continuing education in Germany in the digital age, learners were asked: "Welche Lernformen machen Ihnen Spaß?" (which might be translated as: Which forms of learning do you like?), and "Was motiviert Sie zum Lernen?" (What motivates you to learn?) – the questions referred to learning with digital media. The answers showed that the responders were fond of forms of learning which allowed for a high degree of autonomy (retrieving information from the internet, getting familiar with a topic via explainer videos/video tutorials) and that they liked the flipped classroom concept and blended learning better than online-only courses (Bertelsmann Stiftung, ed., 2018, p. 19).

In the interviews conducted in Portugal for the purpose of the Learning Circles in Libraries project the respondents pointed out that the motivational factors for taking up an online course and completing it would be more regular contact with the teacher, better support from the group, the non-obligatory travel and topics of interest.

The reason "I have not liked the course/ education" was given by only 1% of respondents, but the base was approx. 1600 people, which means this might be important for dozens of potential participants. But – and one could say it is a good conclusion and an optimistic closing – 28% respondents declared: "Nothing is preventing me from continuing". Of course, one must be aware that those results are not specific for e-learning, but refer to education as a whole.

Polish respondents, asked about disadvantages of e-learning that discouraged them from taking up online courses, answered – first of all – that e-learning did not have any disadvantages (30%). If any – they pointed the lack of contact with a teacher (15%) or necessity of being disciplined and determined (15%). One respondent was unhappy that online course did not allow him to achieve the demanded level of education.

The authors of the Portuguese study (Neves, n.d.) pointed out the courses' design that does not promote interaction between students and teachers and other students as one of the main causes of students' withdrawal and dropping out. The consequence of such design is the feeling of isolation which hinders the engagement with the learning community. Both the unstructured programmes, that lead to students' procrastination and the lack of knowledge of the institutional academic services available to the courses participants

are also causes of withdrawals. In the interviews conducted by the Portuguese partner for the purpose of the Learning Circles in Libraries project it has been verified that the reasons that would make the participants leave the course would be an uninteresting or monotonous trainer, uninspired teaching materials, and unintuitive teaching platforms.

To sum it up, it should be stated that the completion rate of e-learning courses is not impressive, there are numerous barriers that stop people from beginning or finishing with e-learning, the majority of people claim that e-learning is less effective than offline education. On the other hand, e-learning market is still growing and the number of people who enrol for different courses is growing as well. There is no data confirming that online education is 'worse' than learning offline. Moreover, e-learning is developing in the term of methodology, using tools and applications and more and more institution invite their students, users or clients to become a part of that kind of education. And thanks to its openness, low costs, flexibility and versatility it could be a real option of non-formal learning. As education in itself or as a pretext to learn something, but concurrently – to meet people, to share experiences, to do something for the development.
Fortunately, organisers and facilitators of e-learning or blended-learning initiatives, such as the Learning Circles, do not have to create everything from scratch. There are theories, models, and data which are helpful in planning and introduction of new learning offers. And it is not very complex and difficult, especially for those who have previous experience with education.

CHAPTER III

ADULT LEARNING SYSTEMS, STANDARDS AND POLICIES
(WITH AN EMPHASIS ON ONLINE EDUCATION)

For the purpose of the Learning Circles in Libraries project we have analysed strategic and statistical documents and reports compiled at various levels: European, national, regional and local, that are available in our countries, as well as national programmes, standards or policies related to the subject of our publication. We have also conducted – as partners of the project – a number of our own researches during which both individuals (as potential members of the Learning Circles), and representatives of various institutions and organisations have been interviewed.

In this chapter we present statistical data showing the situation of adult learning in the project partner countries, and an analysis of national systems, standards and policies that support lifelong learning, non-formal learning, or adult education in general. We reflect on how those systems, standards and policies do, or do not, support people in becoming lifelong learners, develop necessary competences and learn effectively. We elaborate on the role of online education in existing systems and programmes. We also analyse the activities of institutions and organisations that are involved in the implementation of above mentioned systems, standards, or policies. We elaborate on the role of non-governmental sector in the field of non-formal learning as well as other initiatives that may be relevant from the point of view of future organisers, or facilitators of Learning Circles. We try to find out how the above mentioned institutions, organisations, programmes and initiatives are reaching out to the underprivileged groups existing in the society, in order to ensure that they will benefit from the adult learning opportunities.

We do the above with the intention of identifying good practices and valuable experiences of established projects, programmes and initiatives in order to use them – as hints, tips and guidance – in the Learning Circles communities.

ADULT LEARNING IN THE PROJECT'S PARTNER COUNTRIES – A BRIEF OVERVIEW

FINLAND

In 2017, 1.6 million Finns participated in adult education, women being generally more active participants than men. The average amount spent in adult education is 8 days per person per year. The number of education days varies between 10 (in women) and 7 (in men) (Niemi & Ruuskanen, 2018, pp. 5-8). Most adults participate in work or profession related education (almost every other participant, approx 1.2 million people), and most of these

educational opportunities are provided by employers. About 400,000 Finns participated in a common knowledge or hobby, or interest related educational offer (informal education). Common topics included business and legal studies, services, hobbies or safety. Almost 2 million Finns participated in informal, self-directed studies in 2017. Most of these studies are internet-based. Generally, adult education increases work motivation and enhances career prospects (Niemi & Ruuskanen, 2018, pp. 5-8). About 22 percent of Finns aged 65-69 participated in adult education and about half of them studied in a self-directed way. Popular topics included arts, general knowledge, foreign languages and hobbies (Niemi & Ruuskanen, 2018, pp. 5-8).

GERMANY

The most important (EU-wide) survey in the context of the status of adult education in Germany is the *Adult Education Survey* (AES). The German report on the results of the AES which was conducted in Germany in 2016 was published in print and online in 2017. The focus of the *Adult Education Survey* was on adults aged 25-64. In Germany the age group was extended: adults aged 18–69 were interviewed about their learning activities during the 12 months prior to the interview. For the AES see the Eurostat's *Adult Learning Statistics, Characteristics of Education and Training* (2019). In 2018 the seventh national report on education (*Bildung in Deutschland 2018*, 2018) was published; it comes out every two years. This report contains a chapter on continuing education/training and adult learning.

Bildung in Deutschland and the *Datenreport* (Statistisches Bundesamt et. al., eds., 2018) draw on the AES conducted in 2016, but also on the national educational panel study (Nationales Bildungspanel, NEPS).

An overview of internet statistics on continuing education in Germany is given by the German Institute for Adult Education (Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung). A very useful annotated compilation of internet resources on adult education by Doris Hirschmann can be found in Tippelt, Hippel, eds., 2018, vol. 2, pp. 1571-1588. The following summary, published in a book that presents the results of the *Adult Education Survey* conducted in Germany in 2016, refers to non-formal education and training: "In Germany, participation in continuing education has been on a respectable level since 2012. In 2016, 50 per cent of all adults were active in continuing education and training. Based on these findings, the *Adult Education Survey* (AES) 2016 provides numerous detailed results, which are presented in the final evaluation report." (*Weiterbildungsverhalten in Deutschland 2016*, 2017, p. 300, quoted from the English abstract). This report shows for example that 50% of the adults surveyed in Germany (aged 18-64) took part in at least one non-formal education/ training activity (including in-company training)

in the year 2016 (*Weiterbildungsverhalten in Deutschland 2016*, 2017, pp. 33–34). The thematic scope of learning activities was also a topic of the report (*Weiterbildungsverhalten in Deutschland 2016*, 2017, pp. 225–233). There are other Eurostat statistics on the participation rate in education and training which refer to the last four weeks prior to the interview, include data from the labour force survey and focus on adults aged 25 to 64. It is important to keep in mind that the percentages given for Germany vary depending on which survey, which age group and which period of time they are based on (see for example also in

Eurostat, 2019). In order to get an impression of the thematic scope of continuing education/ training courses (formal and non-formal) which are on offer in Germany, it is advisable to take a look at a platform where people can search for all sorts of continuing education/training courses. The meta-search engine (InfoWeb Weiterbildung, 2019) provides such a service; it makes accessible information on courses offered in other data bases. 'Weiterbildung' (continuing education and training, adult education) is considered to be the fourth sector of the education system, complementing primary, secondary and tertiary education.

POLAND

Taking into consideration that Learning Circles (LCs) are planned to be set up in the libraries while searching for data, we put special emphasis on non-formal education. The whole idea of LC is to offer adults non-formal education opportunities organised by libraries (or NGOs, other public institutions e.g. cultural centers) in order to develop their skills as learners and prepare them for effective informal education through online tools including e-learning courses. The most recent and complex data concerning the adult education in Poland was covered in the report *Adult education 2016 (Kształcenie dorosłych*, 2019). According to this report 45.9% people aged 18-69 declared participation in any form of education during last year, including 31.4% (8.5 mln) in informal education and 21.4% in non-formal. In comparison with the similar research carried out in 2011 these

numbers are slowly growing, respectively: 44%, 30% and 20.9%. This tendency is confirmed by another report published in 2018 (*Rozwój kompetencji – uczenie się osób dorosłych i podmioty oferujące usługi rozwojowe*, 2018) focused on slightly different age groups and referring mainly to labour market. According to this report in 2017 in informal education participated 38% (7.8 mln) people aged 25-64. Assuming that the Learning Circles goal is to help vulnerable adults (those who have very limited experiences and competences as learners in general and online learners in particular) to develop their learning skills it is good to know which groups require special support. According to research *(Kształcenie dorosłych*, 2019) participation in different forms of education depends on the following factors:

- Place of living. Most often it is inhabitants

of cities that participate in non-formal and informal education. According to the above mentioned report, in 2016 49.9% of them declared participation in various forms of competences development, whereas in case of inhabitants of villages it was 39.5%. As far as non-formal education is concerned respective numbers are the following: 25% (city) and 14% (village), and in case of informal education: 34.3% (city) and 27% (village).

- Age. The older the respondents of the research were, the smaller was their participation in educational activities. In non-formal education participated 25% people aged 18-49 and only 12% aged 50-69. The same pattern applies to the informal education. Participation declared 42.5% people aged 18-24 and 24.3% aged 50-69.

- Education. In the group aged 18-69 in non-formal education most often participated respondents with higher education (41.4%) in comparison with respondents having professional or elementary education (less than 10%). In case of informal education it was respectively: 57% and 10.7%.

- Employment. In 2017 in various forms of non-formal education participated 46% of employed people and only 13% of professionally inactive persons (*Rozwój kompetencji – uczenie się osób dorosłych i podmioty oferujące usługi rozwojowe*, 2018). Most of the people participating in the non-formal education (60.6%) took part in various forms of competency

development offered in their work places, and paid by their employers (Kształcenie dorosłych, 2019). That explains why the unemployed are so passive educationally (their participation in non-formal education diminished from 10.9% in 2011 to 7,6% in 2016). Employees are very often obliged to improve occupational qualifications, especially in the area of digital competences, considering rapid progress in digital tools used in their work places.

From the point of view of the Learning Circles future facilitators it would be interesting to find out what topics are especially popular among adult learners. Unfortunately there is no research that would provide such data. The above mentioned report (*Kształcenie dorosłych*, 2019) includes only information about general areas of knowledge most often selected by respondents, namely business and administration (23.5%), industry (17.1%), services (13.4%) and health and social security (12.5%). The least selected are courses related to agriculture (7%). Such preferences reflect the general rule: adult learners select mainly educational activities directly related to their professional career. Such motivation as crucial was declared by 56.6% respondents. That is why as additional factors respondents indicated fulfilment of employers' requirements and a need to get relevant certificates, that would confirm their qualifications. What is more, 75% of them participated in obligatory, required by law, courses on work safety and fire-fighting regulations (*Rozwój kompetencji – uczenie się osób dorosłych i podmioty oferujące usługi rozwojowe*, 2018). This is why the average number of hours spent on non-formal education

by adult learner 12 months before research was 55 (in case of one third of them only 8). On the other hand, more than 30% of respondents declared, that what motivated them to attend non-formal education were non-profession related reasons (willingness to develop personal interests), and 17% indicated ability to use new competences in everyday life. Among personal development related topics sport and broad category 'humanities & arts' prevailed. Most of the adult learners considered their involvement in non-formal education as positive experience (51.5%). Even more (60%) expected that they learned during the courses would be beneficial in the future and will support their professional or personal development. Considering that the main idea of Learning Circles is to help adults to use online education for their professional and personal development it would be good to know how many of them have already experienced any form of online education. According to the report quoted earlier (*Kształcenie dorosłych*, 2019) only 5% of respondents declared, that non-formal courses they attended were delivered online. However more than 35% admitted that online resources were used as a part of traditional courses, and almost 15% used digital tools to communicate with tutors and peers. The data from other report (*Rozwój kompetencji – uczenie się osób dorosłych i podmioty oferujące usługi rozwojowe*, 2018) shows that 67% of the people used online resources during informal learning. It was correlated to the level of education: the higher education, the higher percentage of the online resources users. From the point of view of promotion of the Learning Circles it is worth knowing that on average only 15.5% of respondents were actively looking for information on educational

opportunities. Here also we can observe the same pattern as above: significantly fewer adults searching for non-formal courses were among the oldest respondents (only 1.6%) and those living in the rural areas (only 26.3% in comparison to 73.7% in the urban areas). In most cases information was obtained online. As it was mentioned before, the cost of non-formal education was covered mainly by employers. Only 12% of respondents declared that they fully paid required fee, and 21% contributed partially. That may suggest, that adult learners are still quite reluctant as far as financial investment in development of their competences is concerned.

The data from above mentioned reports shows that participation in non-formal and informal education is strongly related to such factors as place of living, age, educational background and employment. If librarians plan to use Learning Circles as a tool to support underprivileged groups they should reach out especially to people living in rural areas, aged over 50, with elementary or secondary education, the unemployed or professionally non active. We can assume that most of them do not have much experience in online education and their competences as self-responsible learners are limited. Adults are mainly forced to participate in the courses required by employers, and remain motivated rather by the vision of professional career supported by relevant certificates than intrinsic need for personal development. However, considering the growing percentage of adults involved in non-formal and informal education we perceive current situation as opportunity for libraries.

PORTUGAL

Our analysis of adult learning situation in Portugal is based upon the results of the *Adult Education and Training Survey* (IEFA, 2016) that was conducted in the population aged 18-64.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN PORTUGAL: WHAT HAPPENED IN 10 YEARS?

- In the decade 2007-2016, the participation rate in lifelong learning activities (LLL) increased by around 20 percentage points (pp), particularly as a result of increased participation in non-formal education, which doubled between 2007 and 2016;
- Participation in formal education, after an increase between 2007 and 2011, registered a decrease in 2016;
- The participation of the adult population in informal learning activities, generalized, having more than doubled in this period;
- The population that did not participate in any formal, non-formal or informal learning activities became practically residual during these 10 years, reducing the corresponding rate from 48.2% in 2007 to 8.2% in 2016;
- By 2016, more than 70% of the adult population knew at least one foreign language, with this proportion increasing by 19.8 pp compared to 2007. English was the best known foreign language;
- The results show a set of wage responses with a complete level of schooling. Between 2007 and 2016 there was an increase in salary premiums at all levels of education, with the exception of higher education;
- By comparison with non-participation, participation in non-formal education activities also contributes to wage salary increases;
- The results also show an association between the educational level of parents and children – intergenerational transmission of education – particularly strong in the case of mothers.

LIFELONG LEARNING (LLL): FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

- Participation in lifelong learning activities increased by around 20 p.p. in a decade, particularly as a result of increased participation in non-formal education, which doubled between 2007 and 2016;
- Participation in LLL is higher for men and for people from 35 to 44 years of age;
- Participation in LLL increases with schooling, but the greatest increases of the decade were observed among those with lower levels of education;
- Participation in LLL for workers, especially employees, relatively increased over the decade 2007-2016;
- More qualified professional groups participate more in LLL;
- Participation in LLL is higher for people with reading habits.

QUALIFICA CENTRES AND ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING

In 2016, the year in which the Qualifica Centres were created, there were 261 Centres (going to 303) in 2017. In 2017, there were about 126 thousand people enrolled in an effort to mobilize adults to develop their qualifications. This effort has resulted in the increase, in recent years, in the number of certifications (partial or total) carried out by the Centers, as can be seen in the table below.

Qualifica Centres Web	
Results 2017 (from 1 January to 31 December)	
Total no. of centres	303
Total no. of inscriptions	125,893
Total no. of referrals	97,085
Total no. of referrals offers	68,281
Total no. of referrals RVCC	28,804
Total no. of certifications RVCC	9,290,867

Source: Platform SIGO, 31 December 2017.

ROMANIA

According to the country analysis produced by the EU (*Education and Training - Monitor 2018 – Country analysis*, 2018, pp 245) the participation and access to adult learning in Romania remains very low despite the need for up-skilling and re-skilling of the workforce. Participation in adult learning was 1.1% in 2017, significantly below the EU average of 10.9%. The population's digital skills are improving but still remain among the lowest in the EU: in 2017, only 29% of the population possessed at least basic digital skills (compared to the EU average of 57%). The skills of the workforce are inadequate for the needs of a modern economy (World Bank, 2018, CEDEFOP, 2017). The respondents in the survey conducted by the Romanian Learning Circles in Libraries project's team were asked to evaluate – through their experience –the interest of Romanians for online education. One interviewee (female, aged 47) said that the situation in Romania could be described with one word: 'evolution". She declared: "I believe that these courses should be better promoted. The Millennials should view them equally as important as the formal ones and attend them

in higher numbers." Another one (female, aged 54) believed, on the contrary, that the interest of Romanians for online education is low. "In my Foundation I have organised such courses in the area of sustainable development and environment and, in general, among participants, most were teachers who needed a certificate for their professional file. There were also some people from the NGO sector. There are also people like me who get their instruction online, searching for courses at famous universities. I have also discovered the Moodle Romania network, which trained several teachers, and they, in turn, developed the platform on their interest areas and now they have online courses for their students. I have seen math classes held online." On the other hand, another respondent (female, aged 39) thought that Romanians attended only those courses which were 'in fashion' and not necessarily needed, or because of curiosity. Another one (male) indicated that the market for such courses was mature, but good educators had

not started to compete with the offline educators yet. An interviewee (male, aged 29) also felt that Romanians tended to behave like 'late adopters'. "The reasons is that most universities, although they use online platforms, have courses which are a series of 'pdfs' or materials prepared by professors, which are rigidly presented. This is something that discourages students from pursuing other online courses or exploring the true capacity of internet, taking the resources into account. At the same time, universities should expand their digital offer reaching out to the BA, MA and PhD students, with digital libraries, virtual reality, access to free tools and licenses which, in turn, would increase their chances for a career". One more interviewee (female, aged 23) thought that there were too few online courses in Romania, in Romanian language. At the same time, she claimed, that the idea of continuous learning should be promoted, so that it becomes a part of people's lives.

NATIONAL SYSTEMS, STANDARDS AND POLICIES

FINLAND

The Finnish law states that lifelong learning is everyone's right. In practice, this means that employers are obligated to give leave of absence to employees in order to study. It is also possible to apply for a study grant to compensate income losses caused by studying (Työllisyysrahasto.fi).

National policy makers are also preparing statements to emphasize the importance of

lifelong learning as basis of Finland's competitive advantage. Policy makers are innovating new financial incentives and compensation models to fund lifelong learning. The statements also imply that technology is the only realistic way to solve the educational challenge (OKM, 2018).

The latest government programme in Finland (published in June 2019) states as follows:

"We will implement a parliamentary reform of continuous education, responding to the people's lifelong needs for upskilling and reskilling. This comprehensive reform will apply inclusive and competent Finland – a socially, economically and ecologically sustainable society – to reach point of the educational pathway at which the educational system interfaces with the provision and funding of education, social security, relocation security, unemployment security, independent and labour market training, and recognition of prior learning. The reform of continuous learning will be implemented as a trilogue with the education providers.

At each level of education, we will develop the activities, guidance and funding with a view to creating a comprehensive national system of diverse continuous education that focuses on meeting the needs arising in the world of work. We will draw up national principles for recognising and acknowledging learning. The principles will seek to make visible the competence which individuals have gained by various means in working life and in the education system.

We will create comprehensive services for lifelong guidance in order to ensure equal opportunities for continuous learning, and to enable a strategic approach to guidance, both from the perspective of individuals and from the viewpoint of society. Guidance will also help those groups who are currently underrepresented in adult education to participate in continuous education. We recognise that the transformation of work and the digital shift create a special challenge in that they will have the biggest impact on jobs with low educational requirements. This highlights the importance of retraining population groups whose engagement in adult education is currently low. We intend to

implement near-term measures to respond to the shortage of skills and to train adults with a low level of basic skills" (*Finland's Government programme*, 2019). How will this be implemented – remains to be seen during the next few years.

The largest provider of non-formal learning in Finland is 'liberal adult education'. The main point is that it is open for everyone to participate. The goal of liberal adult education is to support the diverse development of individuals' personalities and their abilities to work in the community, based on the principle of lifelong learning. It also promotes the realization of democracy, equality and diversity in Finnish society. An essential feature of liberal adult education is not providing degrees. Its curriculum and course selection are not regulated by law (Opetushallitus, 2017).

The objectives and contents of liberal adult education are regulated by the administrators of the educational institutions, such as municipalities, federations, associations, foundations, or companies. Liberal adult education includes both value-based and neutral activities. Background communities can represent different worldviews or religious views or act on local and regional educational needs (Opetushallitus, 2017).

Educational institutions of liberal adult education include community high schools, adult education centres, study centres, sports institutes and summer universities. The educational organisations of adult liberal education are quite independent in their activities and development (opetushallitus, 2017).

Studies in liberal adult education can be general education, hobby-related or social studies. Studying varies from evening courses to full-

time short courses or intensive courses. Folk high schools offer longer-term studies, lasting usually one school year (Opetushallitus, 2017).

Liberal adult education organisations offer online education as part of their curriculum. Most of their courses are still local and classroom-based but the need for online courses has been recognised and acknowledged. Educational institutions for liberal adult education include Folk High Schools, Civic Institutes, Study Centers, Sports Education Centers (Sports Institutes) and Summer Universities. The educational organisations of the liberal adult education field quite are independent in their activities and development. It is also possible for anyone to study university studies in open universities. They offer parts of university curriculum openly to everyone for payment, even though full university degree programmes are not offered. Some materials can be found on pedagogy of online learning for liberal adult education trainers. An example of these is Vapaastiverkossa.fi.

In general, there are still challenges in online learning, and good experiences and learning methods need to be communicated and implemented widely. There is also a need for a common database and a common will to collect all liberal adult education institutions and their course offering. At the moment the course offering is hard to find and requires a lot of local knowledge from the learners. One example of possibilities provided by digitalisation is Linnunrata.fi where educational resources may be browsed. There is also a project called Aoe.fi where the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education are developing a national service for open educational resources (OERs). The service is coordinated by CSC – IT Center for Science

and it is intended for all levels of education to promote the use of open educational resources. The service and the OERs are free to use for teachers, learners and for all citizens (Aoe.fi).

Vapaastiverkossa.fi is an online 'bank' of resources for liberal adult education. It contains instructions and guides on how to produce digital learning materials, use various online tools, and for example set up a blog. It also gives examples of digital learning materials prepared by adult education centres and ways to use the web as a tool for teaching. There are also online materials produced by the Finnish National Agency for Education and other parties, which can be utilized especially in the education of immigrants. Websites and downloadable materials are categorized as sites that support Finnish language learning, glossaries, vocational training materials, and other materials. The materials produced by other parties also contain general information (Finnish National Agency for Education). Tutors, teachers, teachers providing peer support by guiding and instructing other teachers, are also used in adult liberal education (Vapaa Sivistystyö ry, 2018).

GERMANY

There are regulations and funding policies on the level of the Federation, the Länder and the local authorities, which mainly, but not exclusively apply to formal learning activities; the sector of adult learning activities is very heterogeneous in Germany.

For an overview of the adult education landscape see the section *Adult Education and Lifelong Learning* on the Eurydice website (*Eurydice. Germany Overview*, 2019):
"In response to the vast range of demands made on continuing education, a differentiated structure has been developed. Continuing education is offered by municipal institutions, in particular *Volkshochschulen*, as well as by private institutions, church institutions, the trade unions, the various chambers of industry and commerce, political parties and associations, companies and public authorities, family education centres, academies, *Fachschulen*, institutions of higher education and distance learning institutions. Radio and television companies also provide continuing education programmes."
It might be added that private instruction offered by people who work as freelancers can also be considered as adult learning.
A more detailed description can be found in the chapter on Adult education and training in the national dossier *The Education System in the Federal Republic of Germany 2015/2016.*

In 2019 the German government announced the'Nationale Weiterbildungsstrategie (2019),

a national strategy for continuing education/ further training, which is intended to raise awareness for the importance of lifelong learning. There is also a *Strategy for Lifelong Learning in the Federal Republic of Germany* dating from 2004 (Strategy for Lifelong Learning (2004).

The German Weiterbildungstag, a convention and forum, is organised every two years by associations, organisations and companies from the continuing education and training sector. If one looks at the list of contributors, it becomes obvious that the continuing education and training sector is very heterogeneous. Every Weiterbildungstag has a motto. In 2018 it was 'Weiter bilden, Gesellschaft stärken' (might be translated as: focusing on strengthening social cohesion through continuing education), in 2016 it was 'Weiterbildung 4.0 – fit für die digitale Welt' (might be translated as: continuing education and training – fit for the digital world). By discussing these topics and by networking, the various providers of adult education try to strengthen and to define the role of lifelong learning.

Quality assurance measures are often expected in the area of job-related trainings inside and outside of companies, but they are also a topic in (partly) publicly funded organisations, and the requirements for providing high-quality training in the age of digitalisation are being discussed. An association which is active in the area of quality assurance is for example the Gütesiegelverbund Weiterbildung e.V., which

also developed the Tool-O-Search. The Tool-O-Search serves to find appropriate digital tools for different requirements in continuing education and training; you can choose criteria such as target group, costs, prior knowlege of the participants, and the Tool-O-Search will help you to find suitable digital tools (podcast, webinar, VR, AR, etc.). For a survey on quality management systems used by providers of continuing training in 2017 see *Die Umfrage 2017*.

The German Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (*Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen*, DQR) is a tool for classifying the qualifications of the German education system. It gives orientation in the German education system and contributes to comparability of German qualifications in Europe. It covers formal learning, but not (yet) non-formal learning activities (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, 2019).

It is hardly possible to give an overview of the efforts to promote continuing education and training or, in particular, non-formal learning. State legislation in Germany focuses mainly on formal learning activities, which lead to qualifications and certificates. The degree of regulation in the field of non-formal learning is lower.

Some providers of non-formal learning activities are supported by the state on the local, regional or national level, and providers can apply for project grants, if they meet the requirements. For further information on financing see Dobischat, Münk, Rosendahl, 2019.

Generally speaking, costs are often shouldered by employers and individuals, but the state supports non-formal learning activities, for example by contributing to the funding of the

Volkshochschulen (adult education centres) and by providing various grants for projects as well as financial support for individuals, for example via the Bildungsprämie (a type of learning subsidy) for individual job-related continuing education/training, which can be applied for by those on a low income. The state also supports job-related lifelong learning by defining what can be deducted from the tax.

Important institutions which enable non-formal learning in Germany are the Volkshochschulen (adult education centres). They are local institutions on the level of the municipality and offer courses in general, professional, cultural and political education. Since 1962 each year statistics on the Volkshochschulen have been compiled by the German Institute for Adult Education. In 2017, there were over 900 Volkshochschulen (Reichart, Lux, Huntemann, 2018). The German Adult Education Association (Deutsche Volkshochschul-Verband e.V. – DVV) represents its members, develops policies, provides central services and promotes cooperation and exchange of ideas among its members and internationally.

An important institution in the field of citizenship education is Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung (the Federal Agency for Civic Education) and the agencies on the level of the Länder, for example the Centre for Civic Education of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia.

Public libraries, which nowadays also host workshops, make people familiar with new technological devices and provide spaces where people share their knowledge or their learning experience with other people, offer non-formal and informal learning opportunities. Co-operation between libraries and adult education centres can create learning infrastructures. There are

many other providers of continuing education and training, as can be seen on the homepage of the *Weiterbildungsmonitor* (wbmonitor).

The wbmonitor is a joint project of the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (BIBB)) and the German Institute for Adult Education (Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung (DIE)) – Leibniz Centre for Lifelong Learning, and complements the reporting on adult education by focusing on the perspective of the institutions.

There is an ongoing debate about ways of making non-formal and informal education and training more visible by awarding certificates, or by documenting activities, e.g. in a 'Profilpass'.

If one wants to judge whether systems, standards or policies are effective, the question arises as to how to judge the effectiveness of non-formal learning, since there are no formal qualifications that could serve as a benchmark for success. Different scenarios have been outlined that describe how skills and competences of learners acquired via non-formal or informal learning activities could be validated, identified and documented. It will be a challenge to introduce procedures which will not involve too much bureaucracy and are easy to handle (cf. Gutschow, Jörgens, 2018).

In the Bildungsbericht (*Bildung in Deutschland 2018, 2018*, p. 185) it is stated that it is hardly possible to find out whether there is a causal relationship between participation in continuing education and training and potential benefits such as personal development, integration in the labour market or improved job prospects, which may become visible at some stage, but not necessarily immediately after the course. In an attempt to

find out about benefits, participants can be asked whether they expect to profit from a course and they can be asked (after some time has passed) whether they are employed or unemployed. However, the data given in the Bildungsbericht refer to job-related continuing education/training, with a focus on formal learning activities.

There is a strategy called *Bildung in der digitalen Welt* (*Education in the digital world*), which has been approved by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany. The model is based on DigComp and two other relevant frameworks. In 2017, the Standing Conference added a chapter on continuing education and training to this strategic concept.

In order to get an impression of job-related continuing training activities which make use of digital media and are financially supported by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the relevant project database of the ministry can be consulted; under 'Bildungsbereich' you can choose 'Weiterbildung' and see which projects have been approved (Projektdatenbank (2019).

The Länder are also aware of the necessity to promote digitalisation. The Land North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), for example, has developed a strategy called *Strategie für das digitale Nordrhein-Westfalen: Teilhabe ermöglichen – Chancen eröffnen*, which might be translated as The Strategy for the Digital North Rhine-Westphalia: Enabling Participation – Opening up Opportunities. It mentions education and culture as the key to the digital future and the role of the public interest-oriented adult education institutions (Digitalstrategie NRW, n.d.).

Non-formal learning activities that are not job-related (including sports and other leisure activities) usually do not involve online learning to the same degree as do job-related learning activities (*Weiterbildungsverhalten in Deutschland 2016*, 2017, p. 90). The platform wb-web.de of the German Institute for Adult Education sums up important aspects of digitalisation in adult education and provides information and advice on how to use online learning in courses.

The German National Coordination Point for the European Agenda for Adult Learning (NCP) encourages exchange and networking of stakeholders in adult education. It was, for example, involved in organizing a conference on digital tools and media in adult education in Gelsenkirchen/Germany in May 2019.

On the national level, important agencies are the German Institute for Adult Education – Leibniz Centre for Lifelong Learning and the Bertelsmann Foundation. The Bertelsmann Foundation was for example the organiser of the 3rd VPL (Validation of Prior Learning) Biennale in Berlin in May 2019, which dealt with validation of prior learning (also non-formal learning) for education and the labour market.

Furthermore, there is a portal which provides information and ideas on all sorts of educational topics including digitalisation and adult education: *The Bildungsserver* (and its English version Eduserver) is a joint venture service funded by the federal government and the Länder; it is provided by DIPF Leibniz Institute for Research and Information in Education.

Institutions of adult education can also profit from the infrastructure set up at a university. The learning lab of the University of Duisburg supports institutions of adult education when it comes to introducing and testing digital media. One of the projects of the learning lab was the training provided for media coaches of the Volkshochschulverband (the German Adult Education Association). The Learntec, an important annual convention and trade fair in Germany, is a forum for new developments in e-learning, although with a focus on learning in schools, universities and companies.

The *Monitor Digitale Bildung* has compiled information on this topic. It found out:

"Digital learning is a strategic issue for the institutional leaders surveyed: 67 percent of the leaders of private commercial institutions and 50 percent of the leaders of publicly supported institutions consider it very important." (Bertelsmann Stiftung, ed., 2018, p. 63).

As the interviews with learners, instructors and leaders showed, often online resources are not used instead of traditional learning media, but in addition. It turned out that online learning is not the exception, but it has not become the standard either. Usually adult education institutions allow the instructors a high degree of freedom when it comes to deciding how to design their courses (Bertelsmann Stiftung, ed., 2018, pp. 30 and 38).

Important providers of adult education are the Volkshochschulen (adult education centres); staff members of the Volkshochschulen have launched the Erweiterte Lernwelten (which means extended worlds of learning).

The German Adult Education Associaton (Deutscher Volkshochschulverband), together with the regional adult education associations, has devised a masterplan for implementing

a digital strategy. Based on the masterplan, Digicircles have been set up on the regional level, which develop and try out digitally supported teaching and learning formats. Moreover, media coaches have been trained, and with the VHS-cloud an infrastructure for collaboration has been created. The first vhs-barcamp took place in 2014 and it was followed by other barcamps, which offered the opportunity for people working for the VHS to share experiences and ideas and get involved in networking. Another strategy to promote digitalisation is the *Vhscast*, a podcast on digitalization in the field of adult education.

Several surveys deal with the relevance of digitalisation for continuing education and further training, with a focus on companies and universities (e.g. *Bitkom Research*, 2018, and *Trendmonitor Weiterbildung*, 2018).They show that there is a growing awareness of the strategic importance of continuing education and training and especially of job-related digital training in Germany, although much remains to be done.

Curricula are of great importance in formal learning settings. There is such a great variety of non-formal learning courses for adults that it seems hardly possible to define curricula for all of them. However, curricula for certain areas have been defined. Courses which are chosen by participants who want to acquire or improve job-related skills profit from being based on well-defined curricula, because they allow for a more systematic approach and make it easier to compare and validate courses or to issue certificates.

Language teaching is organised according to the levels of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR).

Moreover, the German Adult Education Association has presented Rahmencurricula (which might be translated as framework curricula) covering the areas literacy (reading/writing) and numeracy. *The VHS-Lernportal* (a learning portal of the adult education centres) is based on these curricula. VHS staff is being trained to work with the curricula and to use learning materials (online and print) which have been developed along the lines of the curricula, for example a magazine and an online cookbook with recipes which participants contribute to and communicate about.

In order to explore the potential of Massive Open Online Courses and various other forms of e-learning for instructors in the field of adult education in Germany, a VHS-MOOC under the title *Wake up the giant* was created, a book on this MOOC was published and the MOOC was evaluated (Klotmann, Köck, Lindner, et al., eds., 2014). The majority of the participants were VHS staff, mainly people who had an affinity to the internet, or online learning.

Another VHS project (*eL4 – eLearning und lebenslanges Lernen*) was the introduction of a learning management system in some adult education centres in Niedersachsen (Lower Saxony), which included training sessions for staff members. As staff members, who often work part-time in the VHS, might have found it difficult to attend all meetings, efforts were made to offer seperate training modules at convenient times (Lehmann, Sudau, Ollermann, 2014).

In the project *Digital Literacy 2.0*, which was part of an EU Lifelong Learning Programme, several partners, coordinated by the Stiftung Digitale Chancen (Digital Opportunities Foundation), developed a curriculum for digital literacy.

There are also initiatives which aim at developing didactic concepts including the use of digital media for job-related continuing education and training; see for example a project that was jointly conducted by an institute of the University of Bremen and a Bildungswerkstatt in Verden. It emphasizes the importance of the practical use of such a didactic concept; therefore, a platform called *Weitergelernt. de* has been developed to make the concept known to a wider audience; it also contains a module Digitale Strategie (digital strategy).

In the field of adult education it is often up to the instructors themselves to develop their competences, including competences needed for designing online learning settings. They often rely on self-study and the informal exchange of ideas with colleagues. The heads of institutions interviewed for the *Monitor Digitale Bildung* confirmed that instructors often develop their competences in this way, but they also assign great importance to more formal employee training programmes – inhouse or by external providers (cf. Bertelsmann Stiftung, ed., 2018, p. 36).

As exchange and networking seem to be key to developing new competences, the portal WB-

Web (https://wb-web.de) should be mentioned in this context. It enables adult education professionals to exchange ideas and contributes to community building.This platform also drew attention to a research project called MEKWEP, which dealt with "Media literacy competence of vocational training staff to support the use of digital media in formal, non-formal and informal learning environments" (https://www.die-bonn.de/id/32387).

If adult education instructors faced with the challenges of digitalisation do not want to restrict themselves to informal learning activities they can consult the database *Qualidat* (https://www.die-bonn.de/weiterbildung/qualidat), which contains qualification opportunities – offered both by public and private providers – targeted at adult education professionals.

Moreover, if knowledge of online learning is expected of those working in the field, then in the long term it is important to not only focus on providing continuing education for adult education instructors, but to emphasize the importance of media education skills in all relevant training courses or degree courses. In addition, media educators might be recruited in some cases when filling vacancies.

POLAND

The key policy document in Poland related to adult learning is called *Perspektywa uczenia się przez całe życie* and was developed in 2013 as

a part of the strategic planning process concerned with the new EU programming period (2014-2020). The role of this document – prepared by

inter-ministerial task group - was to implement the EU strategy *Europe 2020* through coherent activities supporting lifelong learning, included in all other strategic documents, including the *Human Capital Development Strategy* and the *Social Capital Development Strategy*. In other words, *Perspektywa uczenia się przez całe życie* serves as a framework for all other policy and strategic documents in Poland that support:

- learning in all contexts (formal, non-formal, informal);
- learning in all stages of life, from childhood until old age;
- identification, evaluation and certification of the learning results.

It responds to the growing trend, that people of various age groups develop their competences related to professional and personal development out of the formal educational system, and as a result, they need standards that would allow them to confirm these competences, e.g. in the context of the labour market. The above mentioned document reflects the principles of lifelong learning (LLL) set up in the EU, namely:

- recognition of learning in different forms and places;
- recognition of learning at every stage of life;
- integration of all social groups into the LLL policies;
- evaluation and certification of learning results despite the form and place of learning;
- development of partnerships supporting LLL;
- human-centered learning policies and methodologies, (g) effective investment in LLL policies and activities.

As a strategic goal *Perspektywa uczenia się przez całe życie* defines: "Children and youth are well prepared for lifelong learning. Adults are constantly developing their competences

and qualifications responding to relevant challenges in their professional, social and personal life." (*Perspektywa uczenia się przez całe życie*, 2013, p. 30). Considering the idea of Learning Circles, the most relevant are the following objectives included in the document:

1. All forms of education are adjusted to the needs of sustainable economy, changes on the labour market and social needs;
2. Work environment and social engagement support lifelong learning.

These objectives are reflected in two other important strategic documents: *Human Capital Development Strategy* and *Social Capital Development Strategy*.

Human Capital Development Strategy (*Strategia rozwoju kapitału ludzkiego 2020*, 2013) was developed to address, on the national level, exactly the same deficiencies that the Learning Circles want to address on local level: lack of support for the non-formal and informal education of adults. The main goal of the strategy stressed the development of the human capital through strengthening the people's potential in order to let them fully participate in the social, political and economic lives at every stage of life. From the point of view of Learning Circles especially relevant is the objective: "Development of the competences and qualifications of the citizens". It underlines the importance of standards that would let all learners, despite the form of education they attended, to evaluate their qualifications and express results of that evaluation in the written form (certificate). For the authors of the strategy certification was extremely important due to relatively high level of unemployment, which was an important social and economic problem at that time (2013). Unfortunately the system of National Qualifications Framework that was proposed in

the document is still under development, although the relevant legal act was passed in 2015.

The other important document *Strategia rozwoju kapitału społecznego*, developed in 2013, similarly to previously mentioned *Strategia rozwoju kapitału ludzkiego*, indicates the importance of non-formal and informal education for building the social capital. This concept is defined as the ability of citizens, based on trust, existing norms and social patterns, to mobilise and connect resources for collaboration in order to achieve collectively set up goals related to public well-being. In this context education is perceived as an important tool providing relevant social competences (diagnosis of the problems, cooperation, creative problem solving, efficient communication, conflict resolution etc.). Learning Circles may contribute to the development of social capital because an important part of the methodology is learning in peer groups, collaboration and mutual support. Participants may be focused on their personal interests, benefits and learning goals, but, equally, on benefits that are important for the local community. Libraries may also help participants use their new competences in a social context, not only an individual one, by, for example, offering Learning Circles members participation in projects addressing to local problems. Collaborative learning may result in strengthening the trust between peers. This is especially worth mentioning nowadays, when the level of social and political divisions in Poland is dangerously high. The following objectives of the strategy are notably relevant in the context of Learning Circles (all of them support non-formal and informal education through partnerships of local organisations and institutions):

- development of the civic skills;
- media education and critical thinking skills especially among elder citizens from rural areas;
- development of the cultural competences and dissemination of different forms of participation in culture.

From the point of view of the libraries, it is worth underlining that the latter objective includes supporting to readership, among others, through the National Readership Development Programme run by the Book Institute and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. Under this programme, each year a certain amount, usually approx. 3 million PLN, is allocated to actions which promote readership and are implemented locally by NGOs and libraries. Additionally, one of the other objectives included in the strategy support availability of national heritage, e.g. documentaries and movies through the National Audiovisual Institute (Narodowy Instytut Audiowizualny) that makes them accessible for libraries and other educational institutions and organisations.

The above mentioned policies and strategies are implemented mainly through operational programmes developed as a part of the overall scheme of implementation of the EU structural funds in Poland in 2014-2020. The two are of special importance from the perspective of the LCs: Operational Programme Education and Development (OPED), and Operational Programme Digital Poland (OPDP). OPED, focused on human and social capital development, includes at least one priority directly related to the idea of Learning Circles: "Equal access to the lifelong learning (formal, non-formal, informal) for all age groups with special emphasis on labour market needs". The financial allocation for this priority is approximately 330 mln €. It covers, among others, activities like development of the – mentioned earlier - National Qualifications Framework, increase

of accessibility of the adults to educational activities, and professional counselling. As it was the case of all other strategic documents developed around 2013, special focus is on the labour market, because of the problem of high unemployment. However, among specific projects – now under development – the following two are of particular interest to Learning Circles:

1. Production of online resources that can be used by adults in the framework of general competences development courses;
2. Prepare schools to play an additional role as Local Knowledge and Education Centres providing different types of courses for adults in villages and small cities.

It can be assumed that libraries running Learning Circles would be valuable partners of such centres.

OPDP is strictly focused on access to fast internet, e-services, and, with particular relevancy for Learning Circles, digital education for all age groups covering broad range of topics. Two priorities of this programme are of great importance: Development of digital competences and Training activities for digital competence development with the budget of more than 160 mln €. The goal of these priorities is to provide digital education to groups suffering from digital exclusion. For example, the FRSI has recently implemented the project e-Mocni. Cyfrowe kompetencje, realne korzyści aimed at development of the digital skills and increase of use of e-services among 100 local authorities all over Poland. The idea of the project is to set up sustainable partnerships including local institutions and organisations, and develop their potential for ongoing digital education. The whole concept perfectly corresponds with the envisaged role of Learning Circles located in libraries and supports online learning skills

among adults. Activities implemented in the frame of OPDP created good environment for this kind of initiatives: strengthened potential of the local educational institutions, developed skills of educators and promoted lifelong learning attitudes among relevant target groups.

Apart from the above mentioned operational programmes non-formal education is also supported by governmental funded initiatives, as well as regional and local authorities. For example, various educational activities are funded by a nationwide programme called Citizens Initiatives Fund with the budget of approx. 60 mln PLN. Hundreds of mainly small NGOs – that could potentially cooperate with libraries – receive small grants for local projects. The Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy is implementing the Programme for Social Participation of Senior Citizens for 2014-2020. This supports hundreds of initiatives, e.g. organised by NGOs, libraries or universities for seniors. The Programme has the following priorities: development of different forms of education services and improvement of high quality educational offerings for senior citizens, which means:

1. creation of more relevant offers for people in difficult positions, for example, those experiencing social exclusion,
2. promotion of new solutions, which enable the learning process as a way to be active for all stages of life, directed especially to older people in a difficult life situation, and
3. creation of an age friendly environment, which will enable to develop relevant cultural and educational offer.

In 2019 approx. 300 projects were funded. Libraries offering Learning Circles for elder citizens fit these Programme priorities. Non-formal education focused on human rights, local democracy and social inclusion

is also supported by the Active Citizens Fund (approx. 53 mln € until 2023) based on financial contribution of Norway, Island and Lichtenstein in the frame of so called EEA and Norway Grants Financial Mechanism. Overall objective of the initiative is described as "reduce economic and social disparities, and to strengthen bilateral relations between Poland and the donor states", and the areas of support covers:

- democracy, active citizenship, good governance and transparency;
- human rights and equal treatment through combating any discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation or gender identity;
- social justice and inclusion of vulnerable groups;
- gender equality and gender-based violence;
- environment and climate change.

Currently the 'national' Active Citizens Fund (ACF), operated by a consortium lead by the S. Batory Foundation, (Aktywni Obywatele) is in the consultation phase. The first grant contests should be announced at the end of 2019. However, ACF supports mainly NGOs, but libraries could be their partners, e.g. offering Learning Circles as form of education.

Apart from all above mentioned operational programmes, and taking into consideration the mainly local scale of Learning Circles activities, for the majority of libraries the key partners remains local authorities and other local institutions (schools, cultural centres etc.) and organisations (NGOs, senior universities, homemaker circles, etc.). Most local authorities have their own policies and strategies, including non-formal educational initiatives on various subjects that the libraries may fit in.

In summary, policies and strategies that currently exist in Poland support non-formal and informal education, but mainly in the context of labour market needs. It is also worth remembering that most of these were developed at least 5 years ago. At the current stage of implementation, operational programmes to some extent adopt formerly set up goals and priorities to the new circumstances, for example relatively low unemployment (6.2% in January 2019). It seems that despite the existing policy framework there is still lack of some kind of policy centre in the area of non-formal and informal education, e.g. one specific body responsible for implementation of human capital and social capital strategies. The EU funded OPED is focused rather on schools as non-formal education providers, although libraries with their Learning Circles methodology could be partners. It would be even better, in case of OPDP, to support directly development of digital skills. Learning Circles could be a perfect offer for all citizens with low experience and skills related to self-learning online. However, in case of EU structural funds it is worth remembering that they are available until the end of 2019 (calls for new projects), and now it is hard to predict what programmes will be operational in the new EU programming period (2021-2027). Libraries – very much experienced in educational activities for elder people – may also apply for funding from governmental programmes like the Programme for Social Participation of the Senior Citizens. It seems, however, that for most of smaller, local libraries the first source of additional funding could be local authorities. That is why it is so important for them to conduct efficient advocacy and communication activities, especially addressed to local governments and partners, to explain the role of non-formal education for adults and justify adopted approach with relevant parts of national policies and strategies.

The policies and strategies mentioned in the previous chapter are implemented by public institutions (schools, libraries), universities, NGOs and companies. Their role in the whole system is different: e.g. most libraries provide non-formal education to local community members, whereas only some schools are piloting projects that let them to be a place of education for adults. Universities produce e-learning courses mainly for their students, but some of them are open. A small number of NGOs develop online courses and deliver them to selected target groups, although most of them offer other forms of non-formal education. Companies provide traditional courses and occasionally produce e-learning, but mainly to sell them rather to other companies than individual clients. Finally, many online resources are produced and made available to the public by globally operating institutions, organisations and companies. In that sense they are part of the educational landscape in Poland, although there are some natural barriers to the full access: language (most of such resources are available in English) and money (some of the courses are chargeable).

The role of the schools in the system of adult education in Poland is twofold:

1. Through the official curriculum they can develop learning competences of future adults (how to be self-responsible learner) and teach them how to use digital tools e.g. online courses;
2. As institutions provided with learning spaces, tools and educators they can offer non-formal education to adults locally.

The reports show that what schools offer as learning competences is far insufficient, as well as digital competences and experience in online learning. The first report on e-learning in Polish schools revealed that:

- most of the teachers and students have never participated in online learning;
- most of the teachers do not have competences to use digital tools;
- school principals do not see real value in online education;
- there are limited access to online resources ready to use in formal education;
- most of the teachers think that results of online education are much worse compared to the traditional didactics (Chmielewski et al., 2013).

No significant progress have been achieved in the last years, what confirms report *Polska szkoła w dobie cyfryzacji. Diagnoza*, 2017. Still broadly understood digital tools are not used by almost 50% of teachers. And when they declare they use digital tools it mainly means PowerPoint presentations. What is more, the overall paradigm of Polish education is still the same: teachers deliver fact-based knowledge and students are expected to absorb it. There is no space for problem solving, projects, two-way communication, etc. However it is worth noticing that currently the Ministry of Education is working on the platform called *E-podręczniki* that should offer, in the near future, online resources supporting national curriculum standards. We can conclude that adults who did not invest in their competences out of the formal educational system, may strongly need educational experiences that Learning Circles may offer to them in order to become self-responsible learners who benefit from online education. Universities and other higher education institutes usually offer e-learning courses but only for their students. However, situation may change soon thanks to the new initiative supported by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education called

Polish MOOC (Navoica.pl). If this project were successful, the libraries running Learning Circles could gain new valuable resources. According to the plans, some of these courses allow learners to obtain relevant certificates. Some universities also provide non-formal education, e.g. third age university that operates at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków (Jagielloński Uniwersytet Trzeciego Wieku). According to results of research published in 2014 (Kurkowska, 2014), e-learning courses are offered in one third of the universities' libraries. Some of them, e.g. courses on information searching and information literacy may be of some value for Learning Circles members because they are related to the competences needed by all learners involved in non-formal and informal education.

According to the report (*Rozwój kompetencji – uczenie się osób dorosłych i podmioty oferujące usługi rozwojowe*, 2018) 82% of the entities providing non-formal education in Poland are companies. Only 11% of them are public entities and 7% NGOs. The majority of the companies (98%) are described as micro, small or medium size which means that are usually run by one or a few persons. Educational services provided by them are paid by individual clients (36%) and other companies (35%). The dominant form of education are classroom based courses and various forms of individual support (coaching) – most of them provided in the work place and related to professional qualifications. That is coherent with results of previously presented research, showing that most of the learners are motivated by professional career and participate in such courses that are directly related to job requirements. Only approx. 10% of the courses offered by companies is delivered online and another 10% in a blended form. However, this data can be biased. For

example the report *E-learning w Polsce – świetlana przyszłość czy chwilowa moda?* reveals that some companies consider such simple educational forms like webinars as e-learning. Additionally, in the recently developed report *Cała prawda o szkoleniach. Raport z badania EY Academy of Business*, 2018, it is stated that only 7% of courses on competences considered as important for a given position are delivered through e-learning, and 19% in case of 'additional competences'. From the point of view of Learning Circles it is important to assume that even professionally active adults may have limited experience with online learning which may be considered as opportunity. The challenge could be to convince these people to participate in the courses related rather to personal than professional development.

It is more difficult to assess the role of NGOs in implementation of the adult learning policies and strategies. Existing reports rather refer to some specific aspects of e-learning methodology than show full picture of the problem (e.g. Lipka-Szostak K., Kożuchowska O., 2016). Existing data shows that online education is still rather limited as a professional development tool among NGOs staff, and there is still small, although growing, role of e-learning as a learning tool offered by organisations in the frame of the project implemented for different target groups. In the light of existing data it is possible to present a few key initiatives focused on dissemination of digital tools and online education in the third sector.

Since 2013 the platform *Kursodrom* has been run by the Academy of Civic Organisations. The platform offers mainly online courses for NGO managers (currently approx. 5000 users). However, such topics are probably not the priority for the Learning Circles, but we may assume that some members could be interested

in parts of the courses, for example regarding the management in general, not only in relation to NGO (eg. strategic planning, team management, communication in organisation, etc.). Similarly, the course offered by the Information Society Development Foundation (FRSI) on advocacy (*Docenić bibliotekę - jak skutecznie prowadzić rzecznictwo*), although addressed to libraries, may be of some use for people interested in advocacy in public institutions in general. More relevant could be another course (*O finansach... w bibliotece*) that the FRSI has made available for all interested in home finances, providing basic knowledge on online banking, insurance, personal finance, etc. The most relevant are 22 courses offered in the frame of the project e-Mocni. Cyfrowe kompetencji, realne korzyści, covering e-services connected to all aspects of everyday life. Since 2013 FRSI has developed approx. 300 webinars on various issues, some of them useful for general public, available on the website *biblioteki.org* (section *Webinaria*). In cooperation with the League of Unusual Minds foundation the FRSI offers for free – through selected number of libraries – access to the portal with courses on advanced programming (LNU). All other users, including Learning Circles members may have access after paying a fee. As a result of similar cooperation with the company Fun Media FRSI offered through libraries a number of free online courses, including English for children and adult beginners (*Funpakiet dla bibliotek*). Taking our experiences into account, we may assume that language courses could be popular among Learning Circles participants. Open online courses are offered also by a number of other NGOs operating nationwide. For example, the Orange Foundation offers access to the course on safety in internet for parents (*Bezpiecznie Tu i Tam. Kurs internetowy dla rodziców*).

Open courses are also developed by some public libraries. Information about current offer is available on the FRSI website (*Biblioteki. org*) as well as on the website of the Polish Librarians Association (*E-learning*). Many of them are focused on instruction, for example how to use MS Publisher, XML editor, advanced MS Excel, Photoshop etc., and could also be used by Learning Circles members.

Among other e-learning offer provided by public institutions especially interested – from the perspective of Learning Circles – may be the list of more than one hundred courses offered by Polish Agency of Enterprise Development (*Kursy online*). The courses cover such topics as law and finances for entrepreneurs, or people who want to start a new company, business planning, marketing, etc. Taking into consideration that – as it was mentioned before – the most important motivation for learning is related to professional career, these topics could be part of the Learning Circles offer. Additionally, a typical meeting at the Circle could be extended, e.g. by inviting successful local entrepreneurs to share experiences with learners.

Tu sum it up, it is worth mentioning that e-learning offered by institutions, organisations, and companies involved in implementation of the adult learning policies and strategies in Poland is still very limited. Lack of coordination between those policies and strategies result in lack of resources that would enable development of open – available to all adults, possibly free of charge – courses supporting professional and personal development, that could be used in the frame of Learning Circles. In case of NGO sector, apart from lack of relevant competences, also important is lack of stable, long term finances for general operation, including expenses

for production and especially for continuous development and improvement of the courses. Public funds are mainly located in formal educational system (schools, higher education institutions), and results of these investments are rather a matter of future. Moreover courses to be developed in this sector are of limited use for adults participating in Learning Circles. All in all, it seems that Learning Circles coordinators will have to make a lot of efforts to find relevant, available courses and constantly monitor recent developments in that area in different sectors.

There is no complex report that would analyse strategies used by institutions, organisations and business sector in Poland to promote online education. Probably one of key reasons is that broadly understood e-learning is still very limited from the point of view of service providers (those who offer e-learning) and participants or users (those who really use e-learning). Even in the business sector online education is still a niche. In the research that has been recently developed it is stated that only 7% of courses related to competences considered as important for given position is delivered through e-learning and 19% in case of 'additional competences' (EY Academy of Business, 2018). That is why important source of knowledge for this chapter was five individual interviews conducted with:

- a manager of an NGO providing e-learning courses as core activity / mission;
- a manager of a big e-learning project for schools run by public institutions;
- an entrepreneur developing and selling online courses;
- a person responsible for the development of the concept of e-learning course, playing role of the tutor during the course implementation;
- a manager of the ten year old e-learning

project addressed to teachers. The interviews were done around the following questions:

- How does your organisation promote online education? What kind of benefits are you trying to underline?
- What is the profile of the learner you address the course to? What competences do you expect from users?
- How do you address problem of so called 'soft' barriers of online learning (e.g. a belief that the traditional learning is better, and that e-learning requires high level of digital competences, etc.)?
- What do you expect of the trainers / tutors? What is specific about this role in online education?

We could assume that promotion of online education should be focused on benefits for learners. In general the following features are considered as advantage of e-learning (Dobosz K., 2013):

- time flexibility from the point of view of learners, especially in the case of asynchronous courses – they can decide when and for how long they will be learning, they can combine learning with other responsibilities, e.g. as parents;
- relatively low cost of participation – despite the courses that are free of charge, even paid-for courses are usually offered for a small fee;
- flexibility of the location – participants can use the course regardless of their actual location, e.g. if the language is not a barrier they can use courses offered by organisations from abroad;
- mobility – thanks to the laptops, tablets and smartphones participants can learn while travelling;
- flexibility of the content adjustment –

online resources and internet make it easy to introduce improvements and corrections in the courses as well as update them;

- self-management of the learning process – self-paced courses allow learners to decide about intensity of the learning;
- interaction with the tutor – online tools let tutors to constantly follow progress of learners, provide them feedback, etc.

What seems to be the most important factor – as far as real promotional efforts made by different organisations are concerned – is that online education is still a niche activity. That means that even in case of business sector the number of learners is usually measured rather in dozens of thousands than hundreds of thousands. As a consequence of that, the providers do not have to take special measures to promote e-learning among those people who are not convinced to this form of learning, have limited digital skills or do not believe they have a potential to be online learners. On one hand, it makes this experience difficult for those Learning Circles that should try to reach out to educationally underprivileged groups, but on the other hand it makes such efforts made by Learning Circles especially needed. What is more, Learning Circles might take advantage from the fact that most of the online courses are offered in the frame of the projects addressed to a relatively small number of participants. That allows the involved organisations to use methods similar to those recommended for Learning Circles: blended education, direct feedback from the facilitator, online communication with the peers / community of learners, collaborative learning and support during face-to-face meeting in libraries etc.

A very limited number of NGOs offer online education (the exact number is unknown), they usually do it for small target groups, very often in the frame of projects funded from public sources or EU funds, what is a serious challenge to the sustainability of the courses (most of them are free of charge so organisations need additional funds to maintain and develop courses and platforms). Small target groups (most often not more than 50-300 participants) make organisations to look for most direct forms of promotion, e.g. courses for NGOs managers are posted on the most popular portal addressed to the third sector members. In case the course is offered to the key target group given organisation has already cooperated with other forms of direct promoting are used, e.g. presentations during conferences and workshops, the organisations' websites, social media, etc. That is what libraries could do promoting Learning Circles. In order to make the process of registration and navigation through the platform easier and more convenient, instructions and tutorials are developed and posted, sometimes in the form of a short video. Quite typical is that FAQs and other practical tips are posted for the same reason. In general, respondents underlined that the platforms must be simple and easy to access. It refers also to the communication tools used by learners and tutors, usually as a part of the platform, sometimes supported by additional e-mail, phone calls, different communicators, e.g. Zoom or Skype. It is quite typical for all organisations to explain the benefits of participation in the course for a given target group, competences that could be developed and objectives of the particular modules. A few of the respondents underlined the role of webinars promoting the course, during which potential participants may get to know tutors and – in case of new editions of the course – find out about the benefits of the course from those who has just completed it. The key messages used in the promotion

process are focused on time flexibility. It occurs equally important for NGO members, especially those who work as volunteers, and cannot learn during worktime, as well as teachers, who – according to the respondent's statement – can learn mainly in the evenings or weekends. Except to the retired, elder citizens, time flexibility could be one of the key benefits libraries may underline when promoting Learning Circles. All respondents agreed that from the point of view of adult learners extremely important is to ensure that the courses include 'practical knowledge', in other words: they expect they will learn something that can be directly used in their work to solve 'practical' problems. This could be achieved not only through 'practical' content, but also via feedback from the tutors or 'blended' form of the course, what refers directly to the idea of Learning Circles.

Courses become more practical if learners are asked to do some tasks related to the problems they face in their workplaces, and then get feedback from tutors and peers, what implies education in small groups. This is exactly what Learning Circles may offer. Another issue – important for adult learners – that has been mentioned by all respondents refers to the relevant certificates. In case of some groups of participants (e.g. NGOs members) a certificate is just a proof that the course has been completed and some competences have been developed. However, in case of other groups, e.g. for teachers, a certificate is a document that could be used in the formal system of professional promotion (it requires some number of hours spent on professional development per year). The value of the certificate – as we mentioned previously the National Professional Qualification System is still under development – may depend on the prestige of a given

organisation. One respondent underlined how important it was for the course participants to get a certificate issued by a specific NGO, considered nationwide as well-known and appreciated because of the expertise related to the course content. Such certificates could be issued by libraries running Learning Circles.

Some public institutions, but also NGOs, have been involved during last few years in the implementation of the EU funded Operational Programme Digital Poland (OPDP), aimed at increasing digital skills of general public, especially inhabitants of rural areas with low digital skills. Their experience could be supplementary to above mentioned experiences of the NGOs, focused rather on small groups with sufficient digital competences. However, online education is rarely used in projects supported by OPDP. It is somehow understandable: since these projects addressed to people with low digital skills it is assumed that online learning cannot be the primary method. Attempts made by the FRSI in the frame of e-Mocni. Cyfrowe umiejętności, realne korzyści project to include approx. 2000 online learners from approx. 100 local authorities show how difficult it is. Even if – apart from leaflets, posters, toolkits, targeted adverts on Facebook and tutorials (*Instrukcja zakładania konta na platformie*, 2018) – local librarians and other local coordinators are involved in promotion. Taking into consideration that courses offered in the frame of this project are really 'practical' from the point of view of learners' everyday needs, and still require a lot of promotional efforts, we may predict, that it will be similar in case of Learning Circles. It may vary in case of particular libraries, but suggested approach may be to start Learning Circles with the groups that have already participated in other forms of non-formal learning.

Other public institutions, e.g. in-service teacher training centers also try to promote online learning either as a professional development tool or a method of working with students. As we have already mentioned, the success is rather limited, although it is generaly assumed that schools should use digital tool as a part of their routine. Either way, efforts to promote online education in schools are currently continued, e.g. in the frame of the project Lesson Enter, that has been recently started by the consortium of three NGOs: the Orange Foundation, the Public Affairs Institute and the FRSI. At the same time the Ministry of National Education is launching the previously mentioned nationwide project E-podręczniki (e-textbooks), and – for sure – will implement promotional activities, that could be used by Learning Circles, even if only as inspiration.

Similar situation is in the higher education sector, concerned with launching of the open platform with courses addressed to general public (Polish MOOC). We can expect a nationwide promotional campaign that Learning Circles might take advantage of. In this context it is worth mentioning that one of the respondents in our survey expressed rather critical opinion about possible success of the MOOC type of the courses, pointing out that the courses offered on such platforms are "designed 'for everyone', which often means 'for no-one'" (they cannot satisfy specific needs of a given group of learners). In addition to that, the interviewee was also critical about the idea of making courses available free of charge, indicating that "people very often subscribe to such courses, and then do not even start learning".

An interesting model of promotion of the online education was presented by the interviewee – an entrepreneur who develops and sells courses.

This model includes building a community around the broader offer of the course's author, including presentation of his/her achievements in a given area (proving his/her practical abilities), e.g. in the form of a toolkit, regular blog, occasional webinars etc. In this context e-learning course is just a part of a larger offer for clients or learners. We could say that what people buy is the community of learners that is able to communicate via tools provided by the author. Librarians could use some elements of this approach. Being providers of Learning Circles – and not authors of the courses – they could build up on their reliability as facilitators, feedback providers and safe learning environment creators.

As we have already mentioned, most companies in Poland that develop and sell open courses, but also some NGOs, are not taking care about educationally underprivileged groups. The reason is that the number of the clients they are trying to reach out to is still very limited, and they can operate in the frame of those who are digitally competent and/or highly motivated for professional or personal development (as one of the respondents said, "people who want to change their profession from a driver to a computer programmer"). According to the most of respondents of our survey, the lack of some digital skills is usually addressed by instructions or tutorials and a very simple interface of the platform. However, the lack of initial motivation that would support decision to join the course is too difficult to be taken care of. Some efforts are taken through gamification, and feedback from tutor or peers to sustain motivation of those who already are in the process of e-learning. Because of the above mentioned reasons it is so important for Learning Circles to try approaching potential learners with limited digital skills and lack of initial motivation. It is worth being aware,

that some additional skills are usually indicated in the literature as required from online learners, e.g. ability to work individually, ability to plan and manage his or her own learning process, ability to search effectively internet to find relevant resources, proficiency in using online communication tools, etc. (Dobosz K., 2013, p. 19).

The success of online learning depends very much on the competences of the people involved in implementation of the courses (facilitators, tutors, or mentors supporting learners, etc.). This assumption is strongly supported by the literature and the interviewees. In Poland, unfortunately, there is still a quite dominant conviction that an e-learning tutor does not require any specific skills. According to the researcher Krzysztof Dobosz, "a lot of educators who work in a traditional way think that online learning does not require any new skills except basic computer and internet literacy" (Dobosz K., 2013, p. 21). It is confirmed – in the context of the training of trainers – by Katarzyna Lipka-Szostak, who made research in that area, focusing on the third sector organisations (Lipka-Szostak K., Kożuchowska O., 2016). As she concluded, most of the 'schools for trainers' and occasionally organised training of trainers neglect the issue of the online education with small exception of webinars. In addition to that, existing manuals and other materials for trainers even if they include chapters on digital learning, are focused mainly on its technical aspects, e.g. how to prepare a presentation or use communicators. Meanwhile, according to the literature, trainers (educators, tutors) who work online should be able to:

- set up and sustain effective communication with learners and constantly respond to their needs in order to overcome the lack of direct, personal contact;
- respond quickly to the problems

and provide feedback related to the tasks included in the course;
- ensure individual approach to each participant;
- motivate learners;
- have a lot of empathy.

Such expectations toward the trainers and tutors were confirmed in the interviews. One of the interviewee, with an experience as tutor during one of courses, pointed out that participants usually expected immediate response on their questions, and feedback to their problems or accomplished tasks. Apart from that, in order to motivate participants tutor has to sustain discussion, set up new threads, inspire by posting interesting cases and examples, discipline about deadlines, all in all "to be constantly online". Except for individual approach to participants, the role of the trainers and tutors is also to create and sustain a learning community, because participants are deprived from supporting role of the face-to-face, direct contact. So online peer community plays an important role in learning process: it strengthens motivation, enables exchange of experience and resources and provides peer-to-peer feedback. It is particularly important that they take care of their professional development, e.g. through e-learning, participation in peer-to-peer forms of exchange of experience, such as professional fora, or blogs. It is rather unusual that organisations that provide e-learning offer support to the trainers and tutors (this kind of support was mentioned by one of the interviewee). From the perspective of the Learning Circles' facilitators – taking into consideration that they are not expected to be trainers or tutors – it is important to know that, probably more than in case of other areas of professional development, they will have to care individually of their competences, looking for online resources, participate in peer-to-peer

communities etc., especially if they would like to make at least a few steps ahead toward being tutors. In other words, the Learning Circles' facilitators will have to be efficient online learners exactly as the Learning Circles members. So they can take advantage from their own experience and share it with other learners. Most organisations in Poland address their e-learning offer and adjust their strategies of promotion to the needs of relatively small target groups. As a result, most of them use direct communication addressed to the potential learners with sufficient digital skills and initial motivation for professional and personal development. That makes the role of Learning Circles as promotors of the online learning among educationally underprivileged groups especially important. Based on experiences of the interviewed professionals, the main barrier for participation in courses is related to rather their motivation, then digital skills. It is important observation from the point of view of the Learning Circles promotion and recruitment strategies.

PORTUGAL

According to a study elaborated by the European Union (2017), in the last decades Portugal has made a significant effort to qualify its population to recover from historical backwardness in this area.

The objective of the National Qualification System (SNQ) is to promote the secondary level of education (high school) as a minimum qualification from the whole population and provide the necessary instruments for its effective execution, in accordance with the financial instruments ensured by the National Strategic Reference Framework 2014-2020 (Quadro de Referência Estratégico Nacional). The National Qualifications System (SNQ) adopts the principles that have been consulted with the social partners and is aimed at restructuring the vocational training system in order to integrate it with common objectives and instruments under a renewed institutional framework.

The Qualifica Programme, presented in 2016, is a government's programme aimed at improving the qualification levels of adults and their employability. The Qualifica Programme is based on a qualification strategy which integrates educational and training instruments that promote adult education and involves a broad network of operators. This programme is a response to the qualification needs of the Portuguese population, whose deficiencies in this area are seen as an obstacle hindering the development of the country. According to Eurostat data (2017), 52% of the population, aged 25-64, has a lower qualification level than upper

secondary education. The Qualifica Programme aims at bringing Portugal closer to the average of the European Union countries taking into account the goals of lifelong learning, and strives to mobilise the adult citizens to extend their qualifications. The Portuguese Government has set the development of adult education and training as the central pillar of the qualification system and considers it a priority of the national policy which means ensuring the continuity of lifelong learning policies and improvement of the quality of learning processes and outcomes. As a result of this policy, the Qualifica Programme was launched as an integrated training and qualification strategy for adults.

Qualifica Centres operate in various public and private institutions:

- centres of public, private or cooperative education;
- Vocational Training Centres of the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP);
- other accredited training entities.

The programme seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- to increase the qualification levels and improve the employability of the adults, equipping them with the skills that are necessary on the labour market;
- to reduce significantly illiteracy rates, including both semi-illiteracy and illiteracy;
- to assess the Portugal's education system, and promote greater participation of young adults in various types of education;
- to correct the country's structural backwardness in schooling and achieve the results better corresponding with the average in the European Union;
- to adapt the delivery and training network to the needs of the labour market as well as

national and regional development models. By 2020, we intend to meet the following goals:

- ensure that 50% of the active population completes upper secondary education;
- achieve an adult participation rate in lifelong learning activities of 15%, raised to 25% by 2025;
- contribute to the level of 40% of the population aged 30-34 with higher education;
- extend the network of Qualifica Centres.

With regards to various forms of education and training, specifically addressed to the adults, it is necessary to mention all institutions that can develop Adult Education and Training Courses (EFA Courses) and Certified Modular Formations, included in the National Qualifications Catalog. These are: public primary and high schools, private and cooperative educational institutions, vocational schools, vocational training centers and vocational rehabilitation centres or organisations, training entities being a part of public entities and entities operating within the private sector.

Distance learning in Portugal is organised through a set of ways, methods and techniques that are used to teach the adults in a non-face-to-face self-learning modes, helped by written teaching materials and regular correspondence between students and the system responsible for the administration. It has a particular impact on the training of teachers, whether in the case of in-service training or in-service training for teachers already in service, as well as in out-of-school education.

In 1988, the Universidade Aberta (Open University) was founded, an institution that uses the above-mentioned methods in its courses, addressed to the large and geographically dispersed populations of the adults, who – in

most cases – do not have an opportunity to participate in face-to-face educational offer provided by the institutions of formal education.

This Universidade Aberta designs and produces materials for the purpose of the distance education or specialized professional training, in collaboration with other educational entities. It also supports recurrent education and training of professionals who operate in various strategic areas, especially the teachers. Since 2004, the TecMinho e-Learning Centre has had an online training offer for middle and upper management of companies and organisations, with a specialized support structure for the development of distance learning, e-Learning, b-learning and m-learning. The Centre's activities include:

- development of e-learning projects for companies and organisations;
- design, implementation and evaluation of custom e-learning courses;
- production of content for e-learning;
- implementation of the R & D and e-learning projects (at the national and international levels);
- development of pedagogies and e-learning technologies;
- preparation of studies and publications on e-learning;
- organisation of national and international conferences on e-learning.

The entities that provide education and training for adults are: the currently designated Qualifica Centres, primary and secondary schools, professional training and rehabilitation centres, the centres of excellence, and other entities with a certified training offer.

The Qualifica Centres can be created by public or private entities: groups of public schools or

separate public schools of primary and secondary level of education, vocational training centres that operate separately or in the network of the Institute of Employment and (IEFP, IP), companies, associations or other entities that have the required territorial, sectoral, or technical capacity, depending on their sectors', or the audiences' demands (for example, if they have been the part of the contracted public network for at least five years). According to the study of e-Learning Governance and Practices in Portugal (2014), the comparative analysis of e-learning practices and perceptions shows that the recent developments of the MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) have modified the approach towards the concept of e-learning. In these environments, the access to information is faster (you know everything about the course: how long it takes, what type of content and lessons it contains, etc.), the online environment is appealing and friendly (the online access and interaction – LMS – is practically invisible to the student), the contents are shorter and more comprehensive (including text, audio, video, multimedia, visual tools, online questionnaires) with immediate feedback that allows students to evaluate their progress.

In an interview, being a part of the survey conducted for the purpose of the Learning Circles in Libraries project, an respondent – Ana Dias – describes the TecMinho's strategy: "We begin by making diagnoses of training needs, than we develop training plans that are appropriate to the needs of organisations and companies, and carry out studies on the development of online education in Portugal. For the implementation of the training plans we have trainers and an e-learning platform, which supports the learning relationship between trainees and trainers, based on training content, learning activities, and

a strategy aiming at problem solving. In addition, we have databases that allow us to manage the trainings, which means: register trainees and their documentation, issue certificates, etc. Online teaching is one of priorities of TecMinho, whose main focus is on the skills and knowledge that allow for the development of online education in Portugal. In order to achieve this purpose, a number of publications dedicated to e-learning for e-trainers, and e-content for e-trainers have been developed, training references, and the so-called 'quality letter' that allows any organisation to realise what they need in order to provide a good e-learning experience for their students." (Silva Dias A.A. et al., 2014)

According to the study *e-learning Governance and Practices in Portugal* (2014), the competences of a training team require some skills related to e-learning. In most entities it is mandatory for the trainer to complete an e-Trainers training course. In other situations, it is the entity's obligation to prepare the trainer to be able to use the required methodology.

According to the e-learning training strategies, the trainer should also be an active agent of the process. Therefore, he or she is encouraged to learn new approaches to learning and teaching, develop collaborative learning plans and promote the creation of communities of learners. The effective cooperation between the team members responsible for the methodology and technological issues is essential for the e-Learning course to work well.

Also, according to the same study, the institutions point out – as a condition for the quality of e-learning – the technical and methodological preparation of both the coordination team and the trainers. It should be noted that, currently, it is

not mandatory for online trainer to complete the e-learning training, and there is no certification of e-learning pedagogical skills. However, this type of programme is being increasingly chosen by the training entities, as a guarantee of quality of their courses. Since the majority of trainers do not have this kind of pedagogical preparation, in some cases the organisations provide in-house training or other support for their trainers (for example face-to-face sessions that address ways of stimulating online learning, specific teaching resources, best practice analysis, e-learning platform, etc.), or issue a special 'e-trainer's guide'. There is a strong focus on interactivity of the learning experience, which is reflected in the care that the majority of entities have in their training content the components that allow for both self study and group interactions.

In 2018 a Certificate of Pedagogical Competence of Specialisation was created for the IEFP by TecMinho, the Training Reference of the e-Trainer. It allows the trainees who have the CCP – Certificate of Pedagogical Competences – to specialise in online teaching.

ROMANIA

According to a research conducted by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (2018) "the weak commitment capacity to deliver long-term objectives (of the Romanian state) undermines the ability to generate long-term sectoral policies that might improve service delivery in such areas as education that could boost human capital and equality of opportunity. The first education law, passed in 1995, was changed 61 times, until a new comprehensive education law (1/2011) was adopted. The 2011 law was passed with shortcutting debates in the Parliament, and amendments started immediately afterwards, and increased after a change in government. Six years later, the most ambitious provisions of the law, tying performance to budgets or assessing the performance of PhD schools, have not been implemented, while there have been more than 100 changes to the law through emergency ordinances. Meanwhile, Romanian students are broadly one-and-a-half years of schooling behind students in EU countries." This shows both a lack of political consensus on the purpose which education should serve in Romanian society and economy, as well as the lack of vision and strategy, at least aligned with the European development objectives.

According to Romanian law, any institution, both public and private, that has 'the professional development' included in its statute may offer training, but in order to issue 'legally' recognised certificates, these organisations must undertake an accreditation process. Employers can organise training courses too, but in order for the acquired competences to be legally recognised, they too have to undertake the same process of accreditation.

In Romania there are 41 accreditation county commissions that operate within the County Agencies for Payments and Social Inspection, under the authority of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elderly Citizens. The accreditation is given for 4 years, based on specific evaluation criteria for each type of qualification, occupation, and a group of competences for which the courses are being organised. In order to receive the accreditation, a provider of training must demonstrate that its programmes are designed by specialised trainers in the area of the training subject, the facilitators have pedagogical experience and the training premises can accommodate a certain number of participants.
What we notice is that the standardisation processes are in place for non-formal education, however, that may cause delays and there is no guarantee that the courses are delivered at a high quality, once the accreditation process has been passed.

In a research study from 2012 *Professionals from Adult Education* (Balica, M. et al, 2012, pp 20-21), the authors recognise that there is no coherent system in Romania for the continuous development of the experts in adult education.

"Usually, the personnel involved in adult education has precarious working conditions – most of them work part time and it is hard for them to make a living just from being trainers." At the same time, the law which regulates the status of the specialist in adult education is not precise, and allows for many interpretations.

In terms of the training programmes to develop by the adult trainers, although the law is requiring 80 hours (40 for theoretical and 40 for practical activities), the requirements are rarely obeyed, even if a representative of the National Authority for Qualification (NAQ) is present at the final exam. The accreditation of the programmes is not necessarily a proof of their quality. The restrictive requirements from the NAQ rarely allow for their improvments, while – at the same time – many other actors (companies, freelancers, NGOs and institutions such as universities offering the MBAs or short term postgraduate studies) are playing on the non-accredited market. Although, the law does not allow private companies to offer certification for positions where a certain type of competence is needed, such courses are covered by universities.

The EU funded programmes for human resources development, the so-called POS-DRU funded from the EU Social Fund, aimed at increasing the competences of the Romanian citizens, have so far put a heavy accent on the reporting and lighter (or even none) on the results and impact.

Although online education in Romania exists especially in academic environment, as a part of internal platforms of companies, it is very rarely mentioned in official documents and does not follow any strategic lines.

The authorities which are regulating the lifelong learning are the Ministry of Labour, Social Justice and Elderly People and the Ministry of Education, through their subordinated agencies. In general, the National Authority for Qualification (NAQ) is responsible for the accreditation of the non-formal learning, while the National

Authority for Quality of the Higher Education is regulating the online courses provided by the universities. So far, we are not aware of any online course accredited by the NAQ. Regarding the e-learning solutions, in 2010 58% of universities had such solutions in place, and in the following year 9 other universities have received the EU funding for such purposes.

The organisations that provide non-formal education via online courses are mainly companies – for internal training and development purposes. Some other companies, like those representing the technology area, organise courses with the purpose to attract and train talents. A platform used by NGOs and universities, which is offering online courses, is Moodle. We have not seen any strategic reference to online education in any of these cases, in terms of investments or long term plans. Several other platforms that have been launched with the EU funding are either consisting of 2-3 courses or have failed to operate once the funding ceased.

For the purpose of the Learning Circles in Libraries project, we have conducted an interview with one of the Moodle Romania managers. She has mentioned that their company is designing and implementing courses starting from what they perceive as the need from the market. They do not use strategies or perform deep analysis, but are reacting to the needs of the companies. At the same time, Moodle and other

platforms offer training courses for online course designers. In fact, the course on design

is free of charge and is available in Romanian language on a series of e-learning platforms.

THE POTENTIAL TO REACH OUT TO THE UNDERPRIVILEGED GROUPS

FINLAND

Digital Participation in Finland – Digital Skills for Immigrants was a three-year (05/2015–04/2018) ESF funded project implemented by Luksia (Western Uusimaa Municipal Training and Education Consortium). The project developed digital basic skills related to the social inclusion of adult immigrants. The project prepared a downloadable guide for teachers and instructors of immigrants: (Osallisena verkossa, 2010).

The Ministry of Finance states that "digital support is important so that all people can be guaranteed the possibility of using digital public services". It has developed a digital support operating model to reach those people who do not know how or are unable to use digital services. The model describes roles for each participant. The actual production of support services is still left for different actors, e.g. libraries, organisations, adult learning centres, authorities and companies (Vm.fi).

Roles for digital support operating model:
- The Population Register Centre supports digital support providers and develops digital support nationally. It takes care of training for digital support providers and the compilation of good digital support practices.
- Counties coordinate and develop digital support in their regions, and put together local network of digital support providers.
- The Ministry of Finance further develops the national operating model for digital support and directs the Population Register Centre's activities (Vm.fi).

The Finnish Association of Adult Education Centres (Kansalaisopistojen liitto KoL) has stated in their strategy that the purpose of Adult Education Centres is to create new ways for active citizenship and participation in the sense of community. Adult Education Centres help people between 18-64 year to stay able to work and support senior citizens to stay able to function. Adult learning centers participate also in education for immigrants in those areas where immigrants have settled down. To be able to fulfill these statements The Finnish Association of Adult Education Centres uses the strong know-how of the field (Kansanopistojenliitto.fi).

There are online courses available for immigrants in Finland. Online learning is often considered as a good learning option, as study on online-courses can be adjusted based on participants' needs and specific circumstances. This is a better environment for practising than a normal classroom. In this environment,

all learners are approximately at the same level in language skills and studying is done in small groups – it gives a feeling of safety.

Studies conducted among immigrants have shown that possibility for different studying and teaching methods (eg. videos, exercises, texts and discussions) get a positive feedback from the students. On the negative side, some of the students feel that teachers presence is not sufficient enough (Raatikainen & Karuaho, 2018).

There are also on-going projects like Osallisena verkossa, which gather and make available information for immigrants, for example links and independent study courses.

Regarding the senior citizens, the most important issue boils down to supporting their overall ICT-skills. There are great differences in the knowledge and skills levels of seniors who participate in various kinds of courses and guidance sessions. Some know a lot and need just tips and hints, some have basic skills, but still need support and some have no ICT-skills

at all. Some have the courage to test and learn by doing, some do not try anything on their own, some are afraid of the technology and anxious that they will do something wrong. Some may also have problems with their sight, hearing, and overall physical condition.

Seniors have also stated that they would like to receive guidance at their own place of living and using their personal equipment (Harkoma, 2018).

Finnish libraries have participated in Senior Surf project, which was organised by Vanhustyön keskusliitto (The Finnish Association for the Welfare of Older People). The Campaign organised different kinds of events, training sessions and hands-on experiments for the Senior Citizens, and provided older people with computer skills using peers as instructors.

There is also a project called SenioriVerkko (SenioriVerkko.com) which supports the creation of sense of community, participation, interactions and feelings of safety for the Senior Citizens.

GERMANY

It is important to ensure that disadvantaged groups in society are given a chance to participate in lifelong learning, as they may have difficulties finding suitable courses and paying for them.

There seem to be no clearly defined standards for inclusive adult education; the 'Index für

Inklusion' has not yet been modified to take into account the requirements of adult education (Sonnenberg, 2019, especially p. 189). However, various adult education providers have adopted an approach that takes into account the concepts of diversity and inclusion. The Volkshochschulen (Adult Education Centres), for example, offer

courses for different disadvantaged groups such as unemployed people, people with disabilities, refugees, illiterates, etc., as can be seen in their annual statistical report (Reichart, Lux, Huntemann, 2018, table 15, p. 57).

After the *leo. Level One Study* (Grotlüschen A., Riekmann W., 2011) had drawn attention to the scale of functional illiteracy among adults in Germany, the *National Strategy for Literacy and Basic Skills of Adults in Germany* (2012-2016) was launched as a joint initiative of the Federal Government and the Länder. Several interest groups also joined, for example the German Federal Literacy Association (Bundesverband für Alphabetisierung und Grundbildung), the German Institute for Adult Education (Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung), the German Adult Education Association (Deutscher Volkshochschulverband), and the German Reading Foundation (Stiftung Lesen). The national strategy was transferred into a national decade for literacy and basic skills: Nationale Dekade für Alphabetisierung und Grundbildung 2016-2026 (AlphaDekade 2016-2026). The idea is to create a broad alliance including all relevant social groups and to raise public awareness for this topic.

Various projects have been launched so far, for example the project ichance, which aims at young adults and tries to reach them via online channels. Basic education / literacy are also national priorities in Germany as part of the European Agenda for Adult Learning.

People interested in continuing education (with a focus on job-related training) who look for orientation and do not know where to start their search can phone a service hotline provided by the Federal Ministry of Education

and Research; qualified staff help them to find suitable courses, for example via co-browsing, and provide information on financing options, grants etc.; hearing-impaired people can also communicate via Gebärdentelefon (BMBF - Infotelefon Weiterbildung).

Due to the immigration into Germany, courses for people with an immigrant background have been provided by many adult education providers. Almost half of the adult education providers offered courses for people with an immigrant background in 2015/16, as a survey showed (for a summary see die-bonn.de/li/1168). Many of these courses were Integrationskurse (integration courses), which are still an important element in the integration concept. These courses focus on language acquisition and conveying knowledge about Germany.

As learners are diverse, learning activities should also be diverse and should provide a wide variety of approaches, methods, contents and media. Online education can help to offer such a variety; on the other hand there can be barriers connected with using digital media, because not everybody has access to digital media and can handle them without problems. Digital media are therefore one aspect of a diversity-oriented continuing education concept, but it has to be made sure that underprivileged people are able to cope with them and do not feel disadvantaged yet again (Rohs, 2016, p. 202, and Groß, 2019, p. 236).

Digital media illustrate topics, they enable people to learn on different levels of knowledge and they invite to learn by communicating with one another. These features make digital media especially suitable for inclusive learning (Ditschek, 2013, p. 221).

The German Digital Opportunities Foundation (Stiftung Digitale Chancen) has been campaigning for equal access to the internet since its establishment in 2002. On its homepage it states: "Our objective is digital inclusion of all societal groups and counteracting the digital divide." (Stiftung Digitale Chancen). The Foundation has for example taken part in the EU-Project Digital Welcome, training ten young refugees, who then in turn act as mentors for creative IT-workshops.

The Association for Media Education and Communication Culture (Gesellschaft für Medienpädagogik und Kommunikationskultur e.V. (GMK), also calls for inclusion as can be seen from its policy paper *Medienbildung für alle: Medienbildung inklusiv gestalten* (2018).

For people with disabilities it is of course of utmost importance that online learning offerings are barrier-free. If they are not easily accessible, they are bound to be less effective. In a wider sense, accessibility and a low-threshold approach can be helpful for all those who are underprivileged for one reason or another. Providing orientation and coaching to those who have difficulties finding a suitable learning setting is also important. If one wants to describe the role of online education for different underprivileged groups in Germany, it is useful to have a look at online learning opportunities for the unemployed, for functional illiterates or for people with an immigration background.

Unemployed people who are registered with the federal employment agency can choose from free e-learning courses provided by the federal employment agency on a portal called *Lernbörse*. As with other online-only courses the effectivity will probably depend on the ability to motivate oneself.

The Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung (the Federal Agency for Civic Education) has developed a number of online guides in a straightforward language style, which avoids difficult words and constructions (einfache Sprache); pdf-brochures and explainer videos are available at *einfach Internet: Online-Leitfäden in einfacher Sprache*.

E-learning in the field of basic education can also take the form of a serious game. A learning game prototype called *Winterfest*, which won several awards, was developed as part of the project alph@bit Game-Based Training in Basic Education – Scenario-Based Learning Offers for Low-Qualified Individuals and was part of a didactic concept.

The interactive Facebook webinars called WEBiTIPP provide consumer tips in German and Arabic aimed at helping migrants to get a better understanding of everyday life in Germany. If people do not have access to Facebook, they can use the website www.webitipp.de, where the contents of the webinars can be found as well as on the following site of the Verbraucherzentrale Saarland (consumer advice centre of the Saarland).

A virtual reality concept which aims at supporting the integration of refugees also shows that there are many possibilities to use modern technologies in order to reach those who might otherwise have difficulties finding their way through everyday life in a foreign country.

This project illustrates the learning and support potential that can be generated from the use of virtual reality and VR glasses in the integration of refugees. In this way, refugees will be able to experience and get to know German culture in

a safe and secure way in this simulated world, which will give them the security to engage in the real world. The effectiveness of this new learning method is being investigated by a scientific team.

POLAND

As we have already pointed out, organisations, institutions and businesses that provide online education in Poland do not usually address the needs of underprivileged groups. It is a result of relatively small target groups they are trying to reach out to, mainly those who already have sufficient skills and motivation. Nevertheless, it is worth reviewing available data concerning participation of the underprivileged groups in a non-formal education, as well as factors that influence their approach to new technologies as learning tools, and specific needs of adult learners in general.

According to the research, the educationally underprivileged groups include inhabitants of rural areas, people aged 50-69, with secondary or elementary education, who are professionally non active or unemployed. The report *Adult education 2016* (*Kształcenie dorosłych 2016*, 2018) gives a little more explanation why the adults do not participate in educational activities. The majority of respondents (78.3%) explained that the reasons were lack of need and lack of time because of family responsibilities. Professionally active people underlined that courses were not adjusted to their working time (35.3%), and the unemployed pointed out that courses were too expensive (36.5%).

Taking into consideration that online education requires some basic digital skills it is worth checking if lack of these skills can be a real barrier to participate in e-learning, similarly to access to internet or hardware. According to the General Statistical Office (*Statistics Poland*, 2017) positive changes concerning internet access have been observed in the last decade. In 2009 only 50% of households had internet access, whereas in 2017 that number exceeded to 81% (77% – broadband). Similar developments were observed regarding computer ownership (more than 66% in 2009 and more than 81% in 2017). An increasing number of people gained internet access through smartphones or tablets, which in 2017 were possessed by more than 87% of adult Poles. Still, these changes have always been less dynamic in rural areas. This preserves the 'digital gap' that is determined by the place of residence, income and the level of education. Between 2009 and 2017 the share of residents of large cities with internet access increased from 64% to close to 86%, yet in rural areas this growth went from 39% to close to 79%. In case of those who consider their financial status as poor, 37% have access to internet, while those who consider their status as good, 77%.

Differences stemming from education led to the situation where in 2017 a mere 19% of people with primary education availed themselves of the internet, while the corresponding figure among

people with higher education amounted to more than 95% (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, 2017). As the elderly are an important group of library users in Poland, it is worth noting that the internet use is strongly related to age. Only 16% of people over 65 use the internet, while as many as 97% of people aged 16–24 are active internet users. Similarly, smartphones are used by 91% of people aged 16-24 and 23% aged 55-74.

Despite still existing gaps in access to internet between different groups, research shows that currently the main reason people do not use the internet is not because of barriers such as the lack of access, lack of a computer or the cost of purchasing one. The problem lies in so-called 'soft barriers', such as the lack of need to use the internet (70% picked that reason in 2017) or lack of appropriate skills (52%) (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, 2017). Among older people the above mentioned obstacles are additionally strengthened by the fear of new technologies and reluctance to admit that they have difficulties using them. The issue of 'soft barriers' was strongly underlined as a key problem that should be solved in the frame of Operational Programme Digital Poland by the authors of the report that analyses strategic challenges for digital education in Poland (Batorski D., Płoszaj A., 2012). According to the report the following issues should be addressed to overcome 'soft barriers':

- lack of knowledge on possibilities offered by internet of solving everyday problems as well as professional and personal development;
- lack of e-services and educational content adjusted to the needs of underprivileged groups;
- psychological barriers, such as a lack of trust to some e-services (e.g. e-banking) and prejudices (e.g. a belief that

computers emit dangerous radiation);
- self-exclusion as a result of some beliefs or biases, e.g. "I am too old for internet and new technologies".

The importance of the 'soft barriers' was confirmed in the interviews conducted as a part of the already mentioned survey. Respondents underlined that – in their opinion – technical skills are not the real problem from the point of view of e-learning users, because the platforms, the course interfaces and the communication tools are very simple. The real problem is hidden in what they described as 'motivation'. It could be considered as a great opportunity for the libraries running Learning Circles. Librarians do not have to worry about the lack of sophisticated technical competences. Their advantages are: the approach to the learners, empathy, mutual trust based on frequent contacts, readiness and willingness to help people who do not trust in their own potential to become an online learner.

Apart from the above mentioned factors, the Learning Circles facilitators should also take into account some specific needs of adult learners that are important regardless of the form of learning, as included e.g. in the training methodology of the project e-Mocni. Cyfrowe umiejętności, realne korzyśći:

- Adults prefer courses focused on practical skills or knowledge, close to the problems they have to solve in their professional lives or responding directly to their hobbies. Therefore, it is important to know what they need and help them to find relevant course. Opposite strategy is also possible: to find a course and then look for participants who would be interested in given content;
- Adults like to have an influence on the learning process. Level of this influence

may depend on their up-to-date experience in non-formal or informal learning, self-awareness of their learning styles, reflection on preferred methods etc. Unfortunately formal educational system rarely makes students to be self-responsible learners. The role of the facilitator is to listen to the preferences expressed by learners, help them to set up their learning goals, and let them to work in self-paced way;

- To feel motivated adults like to be engaged in the assignments that are some kind of a challenge, and at the same time to learn in safe environment. The role of the facilitator is to provide relevant support but first of all to create situation in which people support each other, collaborate with one another, etc.

As we have already mentioned, there is a limited number of organisations or projects that are really focused on e-learning for adults, especially from underprivileged groups. However some

interesting resources can be found on the website of the initiative called Latarnicy Polski Cyfrowej (*Latarnicy.pl*), gathering volunteers who provide basic digital education for digitally excluded people. Materials of some use for the facilitators are also on the website of the project e-Mocni. Cyfrowe umiejętności, realne korzyśći, including manual for the educators working with adults (Dyngosz M., Waleczko T., 2017).

To sum it up, as one of the e-learning courses developers said: "Adult learning comes with a unique set of obstacles. In many ways, the older we get, the harder it is to learn. We are challenged by simple things like reading small lettering or remembering facts and figures. We are less theoretical and more task-oriented in our approach to life and ongoing training. Sometimes, we even feel too 'old' to engage in e-learning courses. Each of these adult learning obstacles has a workable solution. With time and patience, we can find a way around them. We just have to give ourselves a chance." (Pappas, Ch., 2018).

PORTUGAL

Adopting a holistic view, when it comes to lifelong learning, means allowing each individual to reach his or her potential; in other words, to promote an adult-centered approach to education. This approach involves many innovative forms of teaching and learning. For example, the relationship between the educator and the student is much more interactive and the student does not acquire

knowledge passively, but he or she has an active role in the process. It is also about providing learning environments that are tailored to the needs of target audiences and that take into account the diversity of learners (in terms of their age, or socio-economic backgrounds, but also in terms of abilities and attitudes).

This means that the success and well-being of students as well as providing the best learning environments are at the heart of the approach, while the focus is on the transmission of information. Another important element is reaching out to the target groups, so that they can benefit from the programmes that have been tailored especially for them. Therefore, lifelong learning policies should aim at providing student various incentives, but also learning opportunities.

In our survey, Ana Dias describes the strategies adopted by TecMinho: "It is the development of short, well structured courses, with an audio and video based content, and simple games that will keep the students motivated. In addition, a closer follow-up is recommended, via live chat and a videoconference feature, that will bring people together and allow them to express their learning needs."

According to the 2017 report *Construir uma cultura de inclusão através do eTwinning* (Geudens, 2017), diversity is what teachers should take into consideration whenever they enter the classroom. If the projects are built around the individual needs, and the students' interests and aspirations, then all of them will be able to engage in and contribute to the learning process actively, despite the challenges they might experience. Apart from the importance of digital tools in digital literacy education, its use also contributes to the development of creativity, autonomy and entrepreneurship – skills that are particularly valued in the labour market. The ICT (information and communication technologies) skills and, in general, various ways of online education may be beneficial for the underprivileged groups. According to our interviewee, Ana Dias, who reflected on the TecMinho's experiences in this area: "For less privileged groups online teaching is valuable because it allows learning without exposing their weaknesses and avoiding pressures of formal model of education. Video conferencing and live online conversations make it possible to quickly solve real life problems. Short courses, with a simple and effective content based on audio, video, or simple games, are recommended to keep the trainee motivated."

ROMANIA

Although the Digital Agenda for Romania, which is currently implemented by a National Agency under the same name is making a few references to e-learning, there is nothing specific about how online education could be used to target the development of competences for underprivileged groups.

The underprivileged groups in Romania include, for example, young people aged between 18 and 24 years old who have left secondary school and are not enrolled in any form of further education. In the last 10 years, the percentage of such drop-outs has increased, from 11.3% in 2009 to 17.3% in 2013. Apart

from those groups, we could include children and teenagers coming from low income and poor families, young people and adults from rural areas, as well as from the Roma minority.

In our previous projects, we have seen parents of Roma kids interested in bringing them to attend coding classes in public libraries, but these are scarce initiatives. We can say – with confidence – that the idea of associating the development of underprivileged groups with online education as a form of creating new competences is both new and untested in Romania.

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of our best possible efforts to draw a comprehensive picture of the status of adult education and adult online-education in our countries, including adult learning styles, needs, preferences and barriers, we have formulated several conclusions that may serve as a basis for recommendations for policy makers, librarians, educators and others interested in both the idea of Learning Circles, and adult education in general.

First of all, our findings have confirmed the previous assumption that the status of adult education, including online learning, varies dramatically between specific countries in Europe. They also allowed us to explain, to some extent, reasons for such differences, which we regard as an opportunity to help to overcome barriers existing in some countries by exchanging experiences and good practices, and also identifying 'tried-and-tested' solutions that might be implemented in other countries.

In case of those countries where the level of participation of adults in various forms of formal, non-formal and informal education is high, such as Finland or Germany, their national policies, strategies and educational systems take into account the needs of various segments of the adult population, including underprivileged groups. The importance of lifelong learning has been recognised among decision-makers there, which is reflected in their national strategies, programmes and teaching curricula. They have a higher number of stakeholders involved in the implementation of educational offerings addressed to adults, which makes that implementation more effective and better tailored to the needs of adults. The socio-economic status of those countries not only plays a significant role with regard to adult learners, but also to formal educational systems and other institutions involved in adult education.

However, even in the countries like Finland, where adult education is popular, research results show that people with a higher level of education and, generally, better qualified people, are those who take part in adult educational opportunities more frequently. What may be concluded is that the adult education is used mainly by those who are already educated.

Reasons why the adult people engage in various forms of education, including online learning, may vary in specific countries, but they are, most often, work-related. It seems that adult learners enroll in courses or use other educational opportunities because they need to develop their professional competences or boost their

carriers. However, in those countries where adult education is less popular, the benefits of adult learning even in the area of professional development are not fully recognised. According to a survey conducted in Poland, even corporate institutions rarely use digital education as a means to educate their employees, and the market for online courses is considered a niche. Reasons for not using educational offerings for adults are also rather similar in all of the countries in the Learning Circles in Libraries project: lack of interesting offerings, not corresponding with people's needs or expectations, lack of time, due to work- or family-related obligations, little awareness of existing resources, and, particularly in case of underprivileged groups, insufficient skills and low motivation.

In some countries there are no institutions offering educational courses or other opportunities for adult education. In other countries, the educational offerings accessible and available to general public are scarce. Public libraries are among the institutions of non-formal education that offer courses, workshops and other opportunities to all interested adults free-of-charge. Nevertheless, public libraries are cultural institutions, which means they have fewer financial opportunities to implement educational projects, and also face legal restrictions, for example less favourable copyright law.

There are some differences in data showing which groups are actually underprivileged in specific countries and which adults are less frequent learners. In Finland, for example, the first generation of immigrants, especially uneducated immigrant women, are among the underprivileged, while in Romania and Poland, elderly people who live in rural areas are disadvantaged; in Germany and Portugal it

is the unemployed and low-qualified residents. However, even the educated, professionally active citizens quite often do not use the opportunities for continuing education because of their beliefs regarding their age, levels of competences or lack of experience. Some people tend to believe that online learning is of lesser quality than traditional 'face-to-face' education, while others feel uncomfortable in digital environment. Those barriers may be augmented in the case of poorly designed or badly organised e-learning courses. The language barrier is also regarded as an obstacle, particularly in case of immigrants, or when an educational offering is available only in a foreign language, although such resources may be of good quality, offered free-of-charge and contain valuable knowledge.

Of particular importance is the conclusion that an educational offering addressed to adults should contain 'practical knowledge', something that can be used in professional or personal lives and will help solve every-day problems. Courses that will appeal to adults are those that will help them develop their skills and broaden their knowledge of job-related subjects and those that reflect their personal interests. The learning offerings should be well designed and adjusted to the needs and the preferences of the users. Unfortunately, in most countries, such offerings are unavailable, limited, or not easily accessed. Even in Finland, where adult education is very common and many Finns take advantage of digital learning offerings, a difficulty in finding existing online courses has been identified, due to a lack of a reliable information access point, namely a centre or a platform that would integrate available and verified learning resources.

Certain courses are available free-of-charge, but only for a limited period of time because,

perhaps, they are part of a EU funded project whose budget does not allow for maintenance of the course beyond project completion.

In order to address the barriers that the underprivileged groups experience, which may also be of importance for others who do not benefit from adult education for various reasons, additional support from a skilled educator (teacher, trainer, tutor, facilitator, etc.) and/or the community of learners is needed. According to our findings, being a part of a learning community, and the possibility of receiving help or guidance from other learners, may be an incentive for people who do not participate in adult education to try it out. They might try using it not only for educational, but also for social reasons, such as meeting other people. It should be noted that loneliness is becoming a more and more important problem in modern society. We have identified problems in the participating countries concerning the preparation educators receive to serve as tutors, trainers, facilitators, etc., in digital environments. Such a role requires a specific set of skills, including digital competences,

knowledge of educational offerings available online and the ability to evaluate the quality of courses. In addition, social capabilities and various 'soft skills' are required to support people representing various backgrounds, age groups and levels of education. Courses or studies that would allow development of such competences are non-existing in some countries, while others have them. Portugal, for example, has an e-Trainer course that prepares educators to teach online courses.

We assert that a solution to some of the challenges that have been listed is the implementation of the Learning Circles methodology. Other problems can be tackled through coordinated efforts by various stakeholders operating at international (European), national, regional or local levels. This is why we have formulated recommendations concerning strategies, policies, and activities that we think should be undertaken in order to increase the number of people who benefit from online education and from lifelong learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding policies – at various (national, regional, European, local) levels:

- Existing policies, strategies and programmes should put more emphasis on adult people's educational needs (with regard to various groups of residents, including underprivileged ones), involve more stakeholders representing various sectors and levels, including institutions of formal and non-formal education, businesses, NGOs, etc.

- The above mentioned policies strategies and programmes should ensure financial instruments that would tackle the identified challenges (such as lack of relevant infrastructure, lack of skills, inadequately skilled educators, etc.);

- Included in the national programmes and strategic documents should be incentives for various stakeholders to engage into adult education (for example, private companies that will provide a high quality

educational content in cooperation with institutions and organisations operating in area od education);

- More coordination of various initiatives is needed to avoid duplication and enable more efficient efforts (for example coordination between the activities of institutions of formal and non-formal education);
- The role of public libraries and other institutions and organisations that do not belong to formal system of education, but – in fact – conduct educational activities, should be recognised by national, regional and local policies, which – consequently – should be reflected in relevant legal acts (for example regarding copyright);
- More efforts are needed in the system of formal education in order to prepare residents to become lifelong learners (which implies 'learning how to learn' competences included in national curricula, teachers and educators of various levels prepared to teach necessary skills, etc.);
- Continuous investment in technology (digital infrastructure, infrastructure of local institutions) and skills (digital literacy, media literacy) is needed.

Regarding advocacy and promotion:

- Decision makers (both at the national and local levels) should be aware of deficiencies caused by the low participation of the adults in educational offer;
- Local authorities should be aware of the role of public libraries as institutions of non-formal education (providing educational offer to all residents, help adults to develop their skills, address the underprivileged groups, etc.);
- Adult residents should be more aware of benefits of adult education (including online education), not only in work-related area, but also as a means to overall personal development (which will improve the quality of their lives);
- E-learning should be 'tamed' and its advantages underlined in promotional activities (such as flexibility, availability free-of-charge or low cost, no pressure, conveniences for people with disabilities, support and instant feedback from a tutor, certificates to be issued, the community of learners – a chance to socialise etc.).

Regarding learning content and organisation:

- More attention should be paid to the quality of educational offer addressed to adults: practical knowledge, tailored to the adults' needs, convenient organisation, easy procedures and interfaces, flexibility, good design, clear navigation that allows a user to quickly answer "What's in this for me?' question;
- A centre, a platform, or a database is needed that integrates a larger educational offer (for example a number of good quality courses, verified with regard to their quality, available free of charge or at low cost);
- Well designed and accessible language courses available online might be an incentive for more adults to engage in adult online education;
- Online courses should include tasks that allow learners develop specific skills relevant to their needs, but also offer possibilities of socialisation (for example by working in small groups).

Regarding the educators:

- The educators should be more supported by formal educational system (via courses, studies, manuals, educational materials, tips and guidance), but also

through networks or peer-to-peer communities (with specific tools that support that networks and communities) – this way they could share knowledge, experiences and support each other;

- Experts (leaders, 'supertrainers') should been selected, trained and provided with continuous support;

- An attention should be paid not only to digital skills and media literacy, but also on 'soft skills', such as pedagogical competences, communication skills, multicultural skills, knowledge on how to work with adults, seniors, people with disabilities, migrants, etc.

PROJECT'S PARTNERS CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Below we present conclusions and recommendations elaborated by the project's partners for their countries: Suomen eOppimiskeskus ry (Finland), Stadtbibliothek Köln (Germany), Fundacja Rozwoju Społeczeństwa Informacyjnego (Poland), Biblioteca Lucio Craveiro da Silva (Portugal) and Fundatia Progress (Romania). They are supplemented by recommendations elaborated by the Peer 2 Peer University (the United States of America) for all countries that will implement learning circles.

SUOMEN EOPPIMISKESKUS RY (FINLAND)

- The importance of lifelong learning has been recognised among decision-makers in Finland, beginning from national core curriculum.
- Adult education is common in Finland. The most common reasons for participation in informal adult education are work-related. Adult education is often organized as multiform learning, which for the most part consists of online learning. Online learning is popular among adults, as the studies are usually carried out alongside work and online learning provides an opportunity for flexible studying and independent scheduling. Online learning also allows for studying from another place.
- Liberal adult education plays an important role in the Finnish adult education field. The goal of liberal adult education is to support the diverse development of individuals' personalities and their ability to work in the community, based on the principle of lifelong learning. It also promotes democracy, equality and diversity in Finnish society. An essential feature of liberal adult education does not provide degrees.

Educational institutions for liberal adult education include folk high schools, adult education centres, study centres, sports institutes and summer universities. Most of their courses are local and classroom-based but the need for online courses has been recognized and acknowledged.

- All in all, there are plenty of online education resources as well as open education resources available in Finnish, but finding them can be difficult. There is a need for a common database.
- Biggest problem concerning adult education in Finland is that education is accumulating for those who are already trained.

RECOMMENDATIONS (FOR FINLAND):

- There is a need in Finland to provide more accessible, low-threshold studies for those who have a real need for it. Learning circles offer one option: anyone can participate – free of charge and without a long commitment.
- In addition, there is a need in Finland to gather all open learning materials in the Web into a single database where they can

be found and used by different actors. It is worth keeping an eye on developments in this project: https://eoppimiskeskus.fi/projekti/learning-circles-in-libraries/ and the website of another project promoting the use of open educational resources: https://aoe.fi/.

STADTBIBLIOTHEK KŐLN (GERMANY)

- Adult education and continuing education and training (Weiterbildung) is important for modern society, and there is a variety of concepts, resources, initiatives and funding policies on national, regional and local levels. The adult education centres (Volkshochschulen), in particular, play a vital role in providing adult education opportunities.
- People learn for professional development and personal interest. As there is such a variety of programmes, providers and internet resources, it is sometimes difficult for them to find suitable learning resources and they need orientation, information and support.
- The unemployed and those with less formal education are less likely to participate in online learning than those who are employed and more highly qualified. Support programmes and initiatives exist for various disadvantaged groups in society, yet effectively reaching and involving the unemployed and those with less formal education can be difficult.
- Providing information to those who are not able to cope with the variety of learning opportunities, and offering an opportunity for people to talk about what they have learnt seems to be a good approach for all sorts of learning activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS (FOR GERMANY):

Public libraries should:

- join in the efforts of other institutions and initiatives to make online learning an option for everyone, providing information and access to online resources, both for professional development and personal interest, for those who seek to learn outside of formal education and employer-sponsored training.
- make efforts to reach a wide variety of people, if possible those who are disadvantaged in one way or another. As some people may not have much time or money and may not be able to commit themselves over a long period of time, librarians should keep in mind that a low-threshold approach can encourage people to join in.
- increase cooperation between public libraries and adult education centres in order to create learning infrastructures.
- advocate increasing the use of blended learning in adult education. The combination of both traditional and online learning needs to become more broadly established.

FUNDACJA ROZWOJU SPOŁECZEŃSTWA INFORMACYJNEGO (POLAND)

- People who participate in non-formal or informal adult education in Poland are most often inhabitants of cities, employed and with higher education. The elderly, unemployed or professionally inactive persons, people with lower levels of education and inhabitants of rural areas do not participate in adult education at all or participate in it less frequently.

- Non-formal and informal adult education in Poland is used primarily for the purpose of professional development. People who participate in adult education are usually required to do so by the employer, or by law.

- Students of all levels of education are not taught how to be self-responsible lifelong learners. Learning how to learn is not a part of the school or university curricula.

- The main reason for not using digital tools in Poland are the so called 'soft barriers': low motivation, lack of trust, low awareness, self-exclusion and beliefs such as "I am too old for new technologies".

- Online education is recognized as less valuable by both learners and educators.

- Teachers have insufficient competences to use digital tools and e-learning methods.

- There are many online educational resources available in Poland, but certain barriers still exist, such as: language (some resources are available only in English), money (some courses are chargeable) and accessibility (some resources are available only to small target groups). An e-learning offer available to wider audiences is scarce and limited.

- Resources for online education in Poland are produced by various organisations, institutions and businesses, for example global corporations who develop online courses on practical aspects of setting up and running a business.

- Online education providers in Poland do not usually address the needs of underprivileged groups.

- Most public libraries provide non-formal education to local community members. However, being the institutions of culture, they do not benefit from programs, strategies or other opportunities (financial, legal, etc.) available to institutions of formal education. Also, both the stakeholders and the general public in Poland do not recognize public libraries as providers of education. Educational offer of libraries – although considered as beneficial to local communities – is not widely known and people in general view the role of libraries as closely related to books and reading.

RECOMMENDATIONS (FOR POLAND):

- More investment in digital tools and digital skills should be undertaken in institutions of formal and non-formal education.

- Such skills and competences as critical thinking, learning how to learn, cooperative learning and learning via projects should be more included in learning curricula on various levels of formal and non-formal education.

- Public libraries should put more emphasis on promoting and advertising their educational offer (and its benefits for local communities) among both the stakeholders and the general public. They should also conduct more efficient advocacy activities addressed to local authorities, in order to explain the benefits of adult

education and the role of libraries as institutions of non-formal education.

- Libraries that will run Learning Circles should reach out to people living in rural areas, aged over 50, with lower levels of education, the unemployed or professionally inactive. People should be encouraged to use educational resources for personal interest (and not only for professional reasons) and shown benefits of it.
- When promoting Learning Circles, libraries should take into account specific needs of adult learners, for example they should emphasize 'practical knowledge' that people will gain from participating in the courses offered by the LC, and (if possible) certificates of completion that will be issued.
- Learning Circles may be promoted also as an opportunity to build the social capital of the community. For example, such elements of the LC methodology as learning in peer groups, collaboration and mutual support can be used to address local problems, develop civic skills and strengthen trust between people.

BIBLIOTECA LUCIO CRAVEIRO DA SILVA (PORTUGAL)

- In the last decades Portugal has made a significant effort to qualify its population to recover from historical backwardness in this area.
- In Portugal, the participation in lifelong learning activities increased by around 20% in a decade, particularly as a result of increased participation in non-formal education, which doubled between 2007 and 2016.
- Online students have a different profile comparing to face-to-face students because they have family and work-related responsibilities.
- Adults in Portugal, especially those with low education levels, continue to report low motivation for further learning.
- The population is ageing and the skills gap between the better educated youth and older adults is widening.
- Portugal has been making efforts to educate the younger generation of the population by stimulating and strengthening digital literacy and digital skills in all lifelong learning and teaching cycles, including the development of scientific reasoning, collaborative work and design skills.
- Since 2016, Qualifica Centres increased the the number of traninings and certifications of thousands of citizens.
- In 2018 a Certificate of Pedagogical Competence of Specialization was created for the IEFP by TecMinho, the Training Reference of the e-Trainer. It allows the trainees who have the CCP – Certificate of Pedagogical Competences – to specialise in online teaching.

RECOMMENDATIONS (FOR PORTUGAL):

- A highly skilled workforce is critical to help Portugal recover fully from the last recession and meet the challenges of an increasingly global and digital economy.
- It is essential to maintain motivation in adult learning providing better

- information on benefits and tailoring information to reach low-skilled adults.
- To raise awareness of the importance of digital skills and create more spaces and dynamics where people can have access to resources, content and training opportunities.
- Taking into account the structural inequalities that still persist between various regions of Portugal.
- It is essential to integrate the digital competences and resources in the pedagogical processes and ensure the existence of adequate technological infrastructure to increase lifelong learning and training.
- Extend the network of Qualifica Centres (in the end of 2019, the government annouced the opening of 50 new Qualifica Centres in 2020).

- A belief that education is undergoing fundamental changes as a result of innovation in digital technologies.
- To work on social, gender and regional inequalities.
- A normative commitment to the idea that knowledge should be free, both to access and development.
- Encouraging collaboration across disciplinary boundaries and between academics, educators, technologists, and support staff within and beyond educational institutions.
- Arguing that we need new pedagogies and systems for intellectual property which are adequate for contemporary education.
- To give better support to families and also to children and young people outside school.

FUNDATIA PROGRESS (ROMANIA)

- Romania has one of the lowest rate of adult participation in online learning from the EU as well as one of the lowest percentage in IT literacy.
- There is no national framework for stimulating or recognizing officially the acquiring of skills via non-formal online education.
- The few online platforms for courses developed through EU funding are poorly designed, outdated and lack sustainability once the EU funding has ceased.
- The only options for Romanian adults to register into online education are universities, private companies or the privately run platform Moodle – these courses are paid.

- There is not emphasis in the Romanian school system on further learning and lifelong learning, thus, combined with the lack of IT skills, the online education is not a popular option for the adults.
- Romanian adults who use online education are doing it for the purposes of re-skilling or up-skilling and they are already well educated persons.
- People from the rural areas and women are the most unlikely participants in online education.
- The reasons for which Romanian adults choose online education are similar with those of participants from other EU countries, perhaps with a higher emphasis on the fact that the employers are insisting

on transferring the face to face trainings into online ones, due to lower costs.

- These findings are consistent with the findings of the PISA tests from across OECD countries, where Romanian students rank last in the EU on math, reading and science (source: https://www.romania-insider.com/romanian-students-pisa-testing-results-still-way-average).

RECOMMENDATIONS (FOR ROMANIA):

- Due to the large number of teenage school drop-outs, online education could prove a beneficial tool for remedial education

and increasing the skills of people who want to enter the labour market.

- Romania needs to produce a distinct chapter in the Digital Agenda on stimulating the use on online education, with concrete measures and budget investments.
- Romania needs to increase the general digital skills of its adult population, via public libraries or with the support of NGOs.
- Romania needs to increase the emphasis on lifelong learning and active aging starting from the elementary school until university.

PEER 2 PEER UNIVERSITY (THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)

- Define non-formal learning in our own terms. Early in this paper we quote Eurostat reporting that only 10.9% of adults in the EU took part in either formal or non-formal learning activities in 2017. Undoubtedly, this is a small number. But this also raises a very important question: "what counts as non-formal learning?" We should work to ensure we are taking a wide view of non-formal learning and not seeking to reinvent communities of practice which are active but for whatever reason are not currently "counted". There very well may be some advocacy work to be done to expand our understanding of what constitutes learning.
- Chart a vision for learning in libraries. Related to the point above, we must be clear about the vision we have for this work (and it's ok if it is different in each country!) What is important is that learning circles are defined in their own terms, not along the existing (and generally reductive) binary of formal versus informal

education. Otherwise, learning circles risk being cast either as a bad alternative to school (because there are no experts) or as an inconvenient alternative to online learning (because you need to leave your house). Fortunately, there seem to be compelling value propositions for learning circles in each country. For example, in Finland, there is a strong culture of online workforce development, but there has not yet been a concerted effort to ensure that access to ICT skills is not a barrier for all Finns. In Germany, where there is a culture of non-formal learning, learning circles might provide opportunities for participation for people who do not have ongoing professional development through their work. In Poland, where improving learner-centered pedagogy is a focus, it seems particularly important to invite participants into the co-creation of the learning community, demonstrating that digital technology is not only meant for

consumption. In Portugal, where digital training in schools has stagnated following the Technological Plan for Education, there may be an opportunity for library-based programs to provide a pathway for schools to follow. And in Romania, where many adults are not served by formal education, developing pathways to certification, whilst remaining open and free, seems of paramount importance.

- Distinguish between prerequisites, learning outcomes, and course goals. Participating in a blended learning environment like a Learning Circle requires that individuals simultaneously utilize a variety of skillsets: engaging in multiple styles of learning (self-paced, resource-based, collaborative), using new technology, and participating in a learning community. Some of these are skills that must be established before the Learning Circle begins, others should be nurtured throughout the Learning Circle regardless of the course topic, and others are topics that should be directly addressed in Learning Circles. Using digital skills as an example, participants should be comfortable navigating a web browser before a Learning Circle, they will become more proficient navigating online learning platforms during a Learning Circle, and certain topics (like web design) are best addressed by scheduling a Learning Circle in that topic.

- Do not strive to create the 'perfect' course. We have a lot of information about what makes a good course, and we should strive to identify and develop courses that are 'high quality' and 'engaging'. However, we must also recognize the inherent limitations to any piece of learning content: it should always be in service of the individuals who are trying to learn. The point is made in this paper that "video produced with more personal feel can be more engaging that high fidelity studio recordings", and this sentiment can be expanded further: creating a learning environment in which people feel comfortable is more important than trying to optimize course materials. Better to have a group that can overcome a bad course together than an expensive course that positions itself as the end all and be all of a particular subject matter.

- Involve participants in course creation and program development. A variety of points are made about the difficulties in developing intrinsic motivation amongst participants and the 'low status' that online learning has as a methodology. This work must authentically involve end users in the development process; Learning Circles should never be framed as a service that is being delivered. Building on the understanding that retention rates are insufficient measurements of success, the online course should be relegated to a secondary role in the Learning Circle; it is merely a starting point to convene a group of people who are seeking to achieve similar goals. There is no shortcut to developing intrinsic motivation, and relying exclusively on extrinsic motivation is not an option, as this undermines the emergence of any true learning community.

- Build on existing movements. We should be creative in building consensus across our jurisdictions: partners mention a variety of possible stakeholders including language learning centers, NGOs, and formal education. In each case, we should seek to understand the various value propositions and position Learning Circles

as a binding agent that connects these existing initiatives and communities. Are there university students who would like to facilitate as part of their coursework? Would an NGO like to develop learning materials to increase their outreach to the community? Formulating and then answering these questions will lead to longer lasting partnerships and more sustainable learning communities.

GLOSSARY

In this publication, we use several popular terms that are related to the subject of the Learning Circles in the Libraries project. This section contains agreed-on definitions and explanations of how those terms are understood by the project's partners.

Adult education

Adult education is understood as general or vocational education provided for adults after initial education and training for professional and/or personal purposes, and which aims to: provide general education for adults in topics of particular interest to them (e.g. in open universities); provide compensatory learning in basic skills which individuals may not have acquired earlier in their initial education or training (such as literacy, numeracy) and thus to give access to qualifications not gained, for various reasons, in the initial education and training system; acquire, improve or update knowledge, skills or competences in a specific field: this is continuing education and training. (Source: Cedefop, 2014). Adult education may be a part of a both formal and non-formal education.

Formal learning, formal education

Formal learning – learning that occurs in an organised and structured environment (such as in an education or training institution or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to certification. (Source: Cedefop, 2014). In other words, formal learning is understood as all educational offer or opportunities (courses, classes, studies, etc.), provided by institutions or organisations that belong to the system of education of a given country.

Non-formal learning, formal education

Non-formal learning – learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contains an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically does not lead to certification. (Source: Cedefop, 2014). In other words, non-formal learning is understood as all educational offer or opportunities (courses, classes, studies, etc.), provided by institutions or organisations that do not belong to the system of education of a given country. For example, they may include workshops, courses, meetings with experts, etc. organised by public libraries – institutions that (legally) belong to the sector of culture, and not education.

Liberal adult education

The terms 'liberal adult education' is used in Finland and refers to the Finnish specific mixture of formal and non-formal educational offer. Its goal is defined as: "to promote the diversified development of people and to organise education that supports society's integrity, equality and active citizenship". The 'liberal adult education' opportunities can be used by anyone (no previous studies or degree is required). The offer is provided by educational institutions, such as civic centers, folk high schools, sports training centers, summer universities and study centers. The liberal adult education does not lead to a certification.

Informal learning

Informal learning – learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. (Source: Cedefop, 2014). Informal learning may happen in an institution, for example in a library, but is not an activity that has been organised, or managed by this institution.

Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning encompasses all learning activities undertaken throughout life, which result in improving knowledge, know-how, skills, competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons. (Source: Cedefop, 2014). Lifelong learning activities may be a part of formal or non-formal education offered by an institution, orgnisation or some other entity, they may also be self-organised by a learner or occur spontainouosly. With regard to lifelong learning terms 'recurrent education' or 'continuing education' are also used, but more frequently they refer to formal or non-formal educational activities.

Online education/online learning

For the purpose of the Learning Circles in Libraries project we propose to define 'online education' as: (1) provided in non-formal settings / environment e.g. through libraries or NGOs; (2) including adults (persons 18+); (3) aiming at development of general competences / not for degree; (4) using digital tools e.g. e-learning courses, video blogs, tutorials, applications, games etc.

Blended learning

The term 'blended learning' refers to all organised educational activities (being a part of formal or non-formal education) that contain elements of both online learning and 'offline', face-to-face (in-class) activity. The structure of a blended learning offer may include stationary classes where the students meet on a regular basis and an e-learning course with additional resources available for them. It may also be an online course (as a main educational resource)

supplemented by an 'offline' support for learners, for example an assistance (one-to-one meetings, group meetings, a regular class, etc.) from a teacher.

Underprivileged groups

For the purpose of our project we propose to define this group as adults with limited access to non-formal online education with special emphasis on online education. In different countries it may be more or less correlated to the following factors: economic status, formal education completed, place of living (big cities – rural areas), level of digital skills etc.

Learning how to learn

A competence, a skill or a set of skiils that describe a learner's abilities to acquire (or develop, broaden, etc.) his or her knowledge or skills efficiently. There are numerous methods and techniques that may improve people's abilities to become better learners, such as memory techniques, but the area of 'learning how to learn' is also related to a much broaden topic of information and media literacy and includes such skills as critical thinking and ability to search for, organise, categorise information as well as assess its usefulness and values.

Learning Circle

A Learning Circle is a group of people who meet face-to-face to learn something together. Every Learning Circle has a facilitator, who help to organize meetings and create an atmosphere of peer-to-peer learning. Facilitators do not need to be subject experts; the expertise comes from the online course and the community of learners. (Source: *Learning circles user manual*, 2018).

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