

# The Finnish Association of Adult Education Centres - Kansalaisopistojen liitto KoL

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Folkbildning and validation in Finland, a model in  
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# LIBERAL ADULT EDUCATION IN FINLAND

- Liberal adult education is structured under several types of education providers from boarding schools and sport academies to adult education centres.
- Over a million adults participate annually (FIN population 5,5 M)
- The general purpose is to promote equality, democratisation, and active citizenship.
- The learning aims at multifaceted development and well-being of individuals as well as promoting values such as cultural pluralism and sustainable development.
- Studies in Liberal adult education are for most part **non-formal**, i.e. do not lead to a qualification.

# CHANGING WINDS IN LIBERAL AE

- Previously students did not automatically get recognition of their studies in Liberal AE => a massive amount of gained competences remained invisible and also unusable.
- Since 2021 Liberal AE gained access to a national learning database "KOSKI", provided that the courses are described in **learning outcomes, assessed and given a credit value.**
- This is **voluntary** for both the provider and the student => one can still participate in courses without having to participate in assessment.
- Transition to learning outcomes made validation of prior learning also feasible in Liberal AE.
- "KOSKI" database was previously accessible only for formal education. It accumulates an individual's learning outcomes, thus enabling individuals to showcase their accumulated learning via a personal account.

# ADULT EDUCATION CENTERS IN FINLAND

- Cover the entire country (ca. 200 AE centres)
- Association of Adult Education Centres is the umbrella organisation for the AE centres
- Provide a range of courses from languages and IT to cooking and handicrafts, fine arts and basic skills.
- Threshold for participation low – **nation's livingrooms** for learning with low fees.
- Now stepping towards a learning outcome-based system, including an opportunity for assessment and validation of learning outcomes (assessment is on voluntary basis).
- Great opportunity for individuals to have their competences validated and made visible.

# THE POTENTIAL OF LIBERAL ADULT EDUCATION

- There is major potential in strengthening and validating e.g. the basic skills of underrepresented groups.
- Liberal adult education also embraces a holistic pedagogical approach to learning, in which individual needs (also other than subject related) can be met. This can lower the threshold for participation in further studies.
- To be able to get the underrepresented target groups to participate in competence development activities, it is important to strengthen the students' motivation and self-efficacy through validation and making their competences visible.

# NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS MAKING ALL LEARNING VISIBLE

- A national, **parliamentary working group** has been established to take a holistic look at all types of learning taking place, also in non-formal and informal settings.
- Their aim is to give a **set of recommendations on how to make learning from various contexts visible and validated.**
- The Association of Adult Education Centres is actively taking part in the **open consultancy discussions** and providing their expertise to the national development work.
- The know-how of Liberal adult education should be further utilised as part of the validation system in Finland, especially when developing education and training for the underrepresented or in the field of fine arts teaching.

# CONTINUOUS LEARNING POLICY IN FINLAND

- **Making competences visible and validating** them is an integral part of the **Continuous learning policy** (since 2020)
- The policy aims at creating an **ecosystem of learning** between different levels/sectors of education as well as working life.
- Liberal AE as the biggest education sector bears a relevant role in the implementation of the policy.
- The Association of AE Centres supports the centres by providing training, guidelines for validation and a learning outcome-based approach and peer learning opportunities.
- Providers are progressing slowly, but surely: versatile discussions on the benefits and practices among providers

# CENTRALIZED COORDINATION FOR CONTINUOUS LEARNING

- A newly established **Service Centre for Continuous Learning and Employment** (operating under the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Education and Culture) supports and develops validation of prior learning in non-formal and informal contexts in coordination with the regional education providers.
- The Service Centre coordinates and partially finances the implementation and development of the objectives of the continuous learning strategy nationally.
- The Liberal adult education courses financed by the Service Centre must be described in terms of learning outcomes, i.e. the competences gained in Liberal adult learning can thus be widely recognized.

# IDENTIFICATION AND RECOGNITION OF COMPETENCES

- Important that **the entire education system** works towards developing the competence level, personal development and employability of individuals of all ages.
- Competences gained in Liberal adult education (or anywhere else) can be identified and recognized for the benefit of the individual and the society.
- Not always necessary to study a whole qualification: smaller units can be enough to promote a person's opportunities in society (cf. micro credentials)
- Wider societal dialogue needed on the importance of micro learning units
- Deeper dialogue needed between different education sectors
- Courses carried out in Liberal adult education can potentially be utilised in further formal studies, getting a promotion or a new job, inventing new business ideas, or just for personal development.