Developments: Swedish folkbildning continues to be active in policymaking

Overall, the situation for adult learning and education hasnt changed much since the previous year, except for some improvement for the folk high schools. There were no new adult education policies introduced in Sweden.

The Swedish term folkbildning refers to the folk high schools and the study associations, i. e. the organisations that constitute the liberal non-formal and voluntary educational system in Sweden. There is a strong political support for folkbildning in Sweden and a joint understanding that it is important.

The Riksdag (Swedish Parliament) has established overall objectives for folkbildning. The Swedish folkbildning shall:

- strengthen and develop democracy
- make it possible for people to influence their life situation and create participative involvement in societal development
- bridge educational gaps and raise the level of education and cultural awareness in society
- broaden the interest for and increase participation in cultural life.

Based on these objectives, the study associations and folk high schools are free to shape the goals of their activities on their own.

CONFINTEA

In Sweden, the civil society has an active role in the design and implementation of adult learning and education policies. Adult learning organisations are involved in the CONFINTEA VII process, but its uncertain whether they are part of the national delegation.

Sustainability

Sustainability is considered important, but the practical implementation of sustainability varies substantially in the adult learning sector. The Folk High School Teachers Union has a strategy to promote sustainability in their work procedures and is obliged to make an annual report on sustainability measures.

More general funding needed

Swedish folkbildning is largely financed through funding from the state, county councils and municipalities. There is also funding for projects and programmes aimed to deliver certain learning objectives and earmarked funding for certain student groups. There is need for improvement though. According to the Folk High School Teachers Union, there has been a mismatch in the funding and the assigned tasks for the past 25 years. More general funding would be needed to improve salaries and working conditions of the educators.

Challenges: Divided impact by Covid

Because of the pandemic, learning programmes were adapted to the new circumstances. They continued partly online and partly face-to-face. The terms for the Swedish non-formal adult education, both folk high schools and study associations, have been strongly affected, reports the Swedish National Council of Adult Education (SNCA).

The Swedish folk high schools have endured the pandemic fairly well. The folk high schools have managed to uphold the volume of courses and participants during 2020 and 2021. In addition, the government has added extra funding to the folk high schools to meet the extraordinary demands for adult education during the pandemic. On the downside, the role of folk high schools has been questioned by right wing nationalist parties in Sweden.

The Swedish study associations situation has deteriorated because of the pandemic. The number of arrangements and participants has dropped significantly compared to 2019.

Falling participation rates

Covids impact on participation is in adult learning and education is divided. The increased digitalisation and online learning have improved skills among teachers. However, some students have benefited from the situation and others have fallen behind.

Participation rates among the disadvantaged learners have fallen and outreach has been challenging. In general, outreach has required more effort and new partnerships. New

technologies have also been used to facilitate outreach to disadvantaged groups. However, the reason for lower number of applications may not be due to the online training but rather to the fact that the labour market is growing again, and people prefer looking for jobs.

Plans for the year 2022

The Folk High School Teachers Union has developed a policy for folk high school sector and plans to raise it on the agenda in the general elections in 2022. The Union wants to promote sustainable and stable financial conditions of the Swedish Folk High Schools. In 2022 the Union will focus on developing the working conditions for teachers in Folk High Schools as well as promoting FHS as an educational option. The Folk High Schools have a documented ability to a achieve good learning outcomes also for groups who have difficulties in the traditional education system.

SNCA will concentrate on the recovery of the folkbildning after the pandemic, the development of distance and digital education and inclusion of disadvantaged groups. The council continues to advocate for better financing for the whole folkbildning sector.