

The Impact of Grundtvig Learning Partnerships on Educating and Training the European Workforce

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Abstract

It is a well-known fact, nowadays, that Europe is undergoing major transformations since knowledge-based employment and the innovation it initiates constitute its most invaluable attributes in contemporary world economy. The quality of European education can be depicted in the efficiency of its training systems which include both educational and training schemes pertaining to European Commission key activities. Within this framework, Lifelong Learning and its accessibility play a determining role in the optimistic goal of altering Europe into an active, knowledge-based economy. For this reason, it becomes evident that Lifelong Learning entails familiarity on the part of the active labor force with fundamental skills such as the ability to pursue and continue learning as well as the shaping of the learning process over a given lifespan. Consequently, the renowned key competences such as literacy, numeracy, Communication and Technology (ICT), foreign languages and digital literacy obtained through systematic European policy that is delivered through the parameters of the Lifelong Learning Program are required in order for new knowledge to be processed.

Keywords: European education policy, European workforce training, Lifelong learning program (LLL), Grundtvig learning partnerships

1. Introduction

1.1 European Educational Policies

Within the new potential framework for employment and growth in the EU, European citizens have started to face such new challenges as for instance the increasing importance of language skills and multicultural competences in the European labor market as well as the European societies which consist of a wide variety of national traditions and cultures (European Communities - Grundtvig Success Stories, 2007). In addition, New Technologies have already altered work processes thus requiring additional skills on the part of the 'worker'. Consequently, in order to more effectively cope with the above described adjustments, the EU has launched the Lifelong Learning Program and its various action plans such as the Grundtvig Program which addresses the teaching/learning needs of all stakeholders involved in Adult Education. Moreover, the Lifelong Learning (LLL) program aims at providing new learning opportunities for all citizens placing special emphasis on adults at risk of social exclusion including workers at a later stage of their working lives. It ultimately brings together learners, educators and organizations offering educational as well as training programs thus enabling the involved participants to exchange experiences, learn from each other and to develop new approaches toward Adult Education.

1.2 The Significance of the Lifelong Learning Program (LLL) as a European Policy

Within the context of the aforementioned framework, the present study discusses the following:

- a) the ways in which the Lisbon Strategy is aligned with the creation of a new European Social Model that is to be characterized by innovation and knowledge
- b) the ways in which European policies such as lifelong learning practices relate to Adult Education and Training essentially through the 'eight key competencies' stated by the European Council

c) the association of Lifelong Learning to the principles of Adult Education addressing issues relating to social inclusion as well as the active participation of EU citizens taking into account issues of cultural diversity and shared creativity

d) the relation between the Lifelong Learning Program (LLL) and its Grundtvig Action by means of fostering increased participation in Adult Learning, investing in the education and training of the people at later stages in their lives, migrants, women and the disabled thus reinforcing the European citizen's 'right to learn'

e) the structure of the Grundtvig action under the LLL generic policy of the EU focusing on the need to educate a lower-skilled workforce as pertaining to the Human Resources Architecture (HRA) view, illustrated by Lepak and Snell (2002) while at the same time strongly reinforced via the 'investment efficiency', one of the indicators set by the European Commission for the effective implementation of the Lisbon Strategy (Commission Staff Working Paper - New Indicators on Education & Training, 2004:7)

g) the analysis of Learning Partnerships which constitutes a sub-division of Grundtvig under the prism of the new economic reality which pertains to both the flexibility and mobility of the labor force in the EU as a consequence of "the scars left by the economic crisis" as elaborated on by Benton & Petrovic (2013:1) which potentially have impeded Europe's labor markets from functioning on a more efficient level.

1.3 The alignment of the Lisbon Strategy with the new knowledge-based European Social Model

1.3.1 Lifelong Learning Policies and Adult Education

Within the spectrum of the reformation of the European labor market as well as the attempt to cope with such weaknesses as, among others, the insufficient employment opportunities, the European Union is currently in the process of confronting a number of social challenges by achieving one of its target aims that is the provision for full employment opportunities. These social challenges can be distinguished within the following parameters:

- a high rate of long-term unemployment
- the inability of the labor supply to match demand
- a shortage of women's participation in the labor market
- demographic trends depicting an ageing population (The Lisbon Special European Council, 2008:2)

To this end, the creation of full employment opportunities constitutes a major priority for the European Union which is determined to combat technological challenges in the form of ICT, something that is considered a significant element not only for job creation but also for the enhancement of value adding skills of individuals within the labor market. In addition, the challenge of a knowledge-based society leads to the requirement of a higher level of education acquired by future school graduates. Consequently, the overall aim to make Europe more competitive in terms of entrepreneurship and its ability to integrate the objectives for growth and employment (ibid), a modernized and strengthened European Social Model seems to be emerging. The specific model includes the transition to a 'knowledge economy' achieved by social stability (through the combat of racism and xenophobia), the provision of equal opportunities between men and women as well as assistance for the disabled, all catering for 'social inclusion' - an essential issue in need of consideration when referring to a strong European Social Model.

Towards this elaborated Social Model, with the 'New Start for the Lisbon Strategy' proposition in 2005, the European Union has decided to provide a fresh impetus to the Lisbon Strategy via increased growth which can be realized through the encouragement of knowledge acquisition and innovation thus promoting further investment in research. Therefore, the primary concern of the European Union clearly appears to be the creation of increased employment opportunities. Moreover, the Commission intends to attract more people to the employment market and encourage them to remain active, to improve the adaptability and flexibility of the labor markets and to invest substantially in human capital by improving education and skills (A new start for the Lisbon Strategy, 2005:2). To even more effectively accomplish that aim thus contributing to an efficiently innovative and knowledgeable Europe, the Commission has been running a Lifelong Learning Program having officially presented its action plan in September 2007 (EACEA, 2003:1)

As discussed above, in order to face the challenge of a more efficient, knowledge-based, social model, the European Commission has launched lifelong learning policies of which Adult learning seems to be a vital component. To be more specific, based on Widdowson (1983:6-8), Adult Education is defined as the development of "a general capacity for language", whereas Training provides learners "with the restricted competence they need to meet their requirements" and constitute essential factors to "competitiveness and employability, social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development across Europe" (European Commission- "Our Mission", 2009:1) Therefore,

“Member States can no longer afford to be without an efficient adult learning system integrated into their lifelong learning strategy” (European Commission – “Learning for All”, 2009). This system is likely to provide adult learners with increased labor market access, improved social integration and preparation for active involvement even in later stages. For this reason, it is deemed vital that nations ensure they possess systems which enable them to not only define and assess priorities but to also effectively monitor their implementation in the EU context. It is also worth mentioning that research conducted on older adult age groups indicates that those who engage in learning are healthier something which leads to a consequent reduction in (state) healthcare costs.

1.3.2 Parameters of the EU Investment in an Efficient Adult Education System

To further reinforce the need for investing in an efficient Adult Education system, The European Council launched the Reference Framework (Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, 2006:13), with a view to making the eight key competencies identifiable to every learner. These can be summarized as follows:

- Effective Communication in foreign languages
- Digital competence
- Learning to learn skills (the ability to learn independently)
- Social and civic competencies (e.g. interpersonal and intrapersonal communication skills)
- Cultural awareness
- Ability to self-express and collaborate effectively in groups

These competencies constitute profound Adult Education principles since learning ways in which to function within society by bringing in previously obtained life experience and learning are primary Adult learning principles which can contribute to a meaningful life within a knowledge-based economic and social model. As further stated in the Reference Framework (2006:14), competence in the form of literacy, numeracy as well as Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), is a vital foundation for learning while at the same time ‘learning how to learn’ policies support the premises of all learning activities especially within the Adult Education framework. Adult learning principles including learners’ prior experience modified in the form of critical thinking, learning strategies relating to problem solving skills and decision making abilities, taking initiative in the negotiation of syllabus topics (Sifakis, 2008a:148,150) all play a significant role in the adult learners’ acquisition of the eight competencies that are crucial for their personal, professional and social development.

2. Method

2.1 Lifelong Learning Schemes within the Adult Education Framework

In the context of the aforementioned Adult Education framework, the aspect of using a variety of learning sources other than those provided by the formal educational system for instance, clearly connects to the adult learners’ potential to learn not only in the formal but also in informal and non formal settings thus establishing their ‘right to learn’ which is “prominent in the rhetoric of lifelong learning policies” (Kumpulainen, 2009:1). In fact, a significant amount of what is learnt relies largely on knowledge acquired through use of Communication Technologies (ICT) as well as within job related settings.

In order to support the European citizens’ right to learn in all environments, the European Commission has actively reinforced the idea that in our days lifelong learning is vital to the growth of the labor force as well as “ the participation of everyone in society” (European Commission, “Lifelong Learning Program”, 2009:1). This is the precise reason it has incorporated a number of its educational and training acts under one policy, namely the Lifelong Learning Program (LLL), whereby one of its fundamental goals is to “enable individuals at all stages of their lives to pursue stimulating learning opportunities across Europe” (ibid).

2.2 Decisive Measures of the European Commission

For the Lifelong Learning (LLL) program to be implemented in alignment with the previously stated adult learning policies, all learning stakeholders will have to take into consideration the six key messages decided upon in the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (2000). These messages appear to be the ‘New basic skills for all’, ‘More investment in human resources’, ‘Innovation in teaching and learning’, ‘valuing learning’, ‘Rethinking guidance and counseling’, ‘Bringing learning closer to home’ along with some additional messages comprising the ‘follow-up, evaluation and monitoring’ of the projects for more effective implementation of results, ‘Research into new teaching methods through partnerships and dissemination of results’, ‘valuing the role of civil society organizations’ such as local authorities and educational institutes.

The six messages drawn up in the Memorandum referred to in the previous paragraph, are clearly streamlined with the combating of social exclusion while at the same time fostering social inclusion, i.e. “giving all individuals equal opportunities to be part of a local community and to play an active role in making it better” (The Conclusions of the consultation platform, 2001:6). Fighting social exclusion means supporting people who, for such reasons as disability, age, racism, gender, social class and other, are not likely to participate in various educational and/or training events.

2.3 Further Procedures – Valuing Learning

In addition to the acquisition of the new basic skills described in the Memorandum, the Lifelong Learning Program (LLL) promotes active citizenship in the form of learning in connection to cultural diversity and creativity which should also be expressed in agreement with different bodies on a regional, national and European level. More specifically, active citizenship concerns social responsibility and solidarity and the Lifelong Learning Program can be a part of an active citizenship process. This can be accomplished by investing money and equity on the one hand as well as in the innovation in teaching and learning on the other hand (A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, 2000:12-13). The first connects to providing opportunities that encourage participation and support different kinds of learners while the second relates to the use of modernized systems through ICT and the fostering of measures for disadvantaged target groups.

‘Valuing learning’ is profoundly realized through the new roles of the different ‘actors’ as the stakeholders are referred to in the field of LLL shifting from a more restricted to a more interactive process between learners and trainers. In this sense, learners require support, in terms of guidance and counseling in order to become capable of exploiting learning opportunities throughout their lifespan. Upon completion of that objective, learning partnerships and cooperation between local authorities, education and training involving ICT should be established since those kinds of partnerships focusing on raising not only individual but also ‘local’ skills are also likely to promote economic development.

2.4 The Grundtvig Policy “It is never too late to learn; it is always a good time” rewards the EU

As has been previously analyzed, social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development, seem to be predominant in an attempt to improve Europe’s competitiveness and employability with Adult Education constituting an essential element for lifelong learning. This axiomatic outlook is recognized by Member States according to the Communication from the Commission (2006). However, the Commission, with its report ‘Adult learning: it is never too late to learn’, conveys the message that education and training are two key factors in achieving the Lisbon Strategy’s objectives for economic growth, competitiveness and social inclusion, the implementation of which remains weak.

In order for the previously illustrated objectives to be attained, learning throughout the European citizens’ lifespan continues to be of utmost significance for the European Union in order for the participation of an adult population in the workforce to increase (Communication from the Commission, 2006:4). Within this mode of action, the EU will be rewarded with such benefits as increased productivity, employability and social inclusion, better healthcare, lower crime rates and greater individual well-being and fulfillment (ibid). This remark, within the Commission’s study, apparently indicates the fact that adult learning does not only contribute to adults’ professional development but also adds to their personal welfare and to their becoming more active citizens.

2.4.1 The Added Value of the Grundtvig

According to the message communicated and delivered by the European Commission (2006), “Adult learning has an important role to play in meeting the challenges facing Europe”, but its potential has not been fully exploited yet. The specific report makes explicit the fact that by fostering such measures as increasing participation in adult learning through a number of various teaching - training programs thus rendering it more equitable, investing in improving teaching methods and materials, implementing systems for validation and recognition of both non-formal and informal learning, investing in the education and training of elderly people and migrants, enhancing the quality and comparability of data on adult learning, it will truly be ‘never too late to learn’ thus reaping benefits for both society and economy.

Another similar study, the ‘Action Plan on Adult Learning’ (2007), focuses on disadvantaged target groups and the action that could be taken to raise their literacy levels, inadequate learning and social skills along with their successful integration in society. As previously mentioned, these particular groups include migrants, elderly people, women or the disabled, all under the process of inclusion within lifelong learning actions such as ‘Grundtvig’ partnerships for example. It naturally comes as a consequence from the previously mentioned views that Europe is faced with solemn challenges which have to be efficiently met via appropriate learning actions (Action Plan on Adult

learning, 2007:3). In particular, these challenges can be summarized into upgrading lower-skilled workers, offering a second chance to early school-leavers, reducing the persistent problem of poverty and therefore social exclusion, increasing the integration of migrants in society and the labor market and raising participation in lifelong learning. As a result of all this, the Lifelong Learning Program (LLL) is likely to assist adult learners towards being more active, autonomous citizens.

2.4.2 Grundtvig: the vital bridge between policy and practice

In the above context, the present study sets out to explore one of the actions of the LLL described in detail, namely the ‘Grundtvig’ action and more specifically the learning partnerships that can be potentially formed via this action among Member States. As has been made explicit, encouraging individuals to take part in different adult learning programs for reasons of personal growth as well as employability is a major concern of adult learning. However, the goal is not only to simply attract people into educational and training courses (Action Plan on Adult Learning, 2007:8) but also to motivate them to remain in and complete these programs. One way to accomplish the objective of involving learners in decision making when learning programs are concerned is to establish a ‘learning contract’ with them especially when it comes to negotiating the syllabus of a particular program they are going to be attending (Sifakis, 2008:170). The ‘Grundtvig’ action as is discussed in the following section, examines the potential of having learners feel as active participants of the learning process.

As a result of the aforesaid objectives of the Lifelong Learning project (LLL) strategy, the European Union has brought into existence, among other actions, the Grundtvig program - the insightful analysis of which constitutes the concern of this study. More specifically, “the Grundtvig program focuses on the teaching and learning needs of those involved in Adult Education and alternative education streams, as well as the institutions and organizations delivering these services” (European Commission - “Practical Learning for Adults”, 2009:1). To further illustrate this notion, this program aims at providing adult learners with ways to improve their knowledge and skills, keeping them mentally fit and potentially more employable (ibid)

3. Results

3.1 The Grundtvig Project Objectives

Originally articulated in 2000 in the framework of the Socrates II Program, Grundtvig has both contributed to the development and implementation of the European Union’s initiatives for a better economy and society; “it provides the vital bridge between policy and practice” (European Communities, 2008:5) enabling, on the one hand, educators to develop innovative teaching approaches and, on the other hand, allowing learners to “cross national borders in search of new opportunities for training and knowledge” (ibid). Moreover, the Grundtvig program covers and is open to all types of education namely formal, non-formal and informal while paying special attention to those with particular needs: “people lacking basic education, living in rural and/or disadvantaged areas, those disadvantaged for socio-economic reasons, people with disabilities or severe learning problems, and social groups which are ‘hard to reach’ and do not generally tend to take part in educational initiatives” (ibid).

Within the framework of responding to the dual educational challenge of the large number of adults who have left school early, or, in the case of many migrants, never having had the opportunity to receive schooling as well as an ageing population (Grundtvig-Adult Education and other educational pathways, 2006:23), the specific objectives of the Grundtvig program as set out in Article 29.1 of the program Decision seem to be:

- To respond to the educational challenge of an ageing population in Europe and
- To help provide adults with new training pathways to improve their knowledge and competencies.

On the other hand, the operational objectives of Grundtvig as set out in Article 29.2 of the program Decision appear to be as follows:

- To improve the individual mobility throughout Europe as well as the quality of cooperation between European Adult education organizations especially within the new economic situation in which ‘learning in a crisis’ has already become an established notion (Cedefop, 2009). As stated by the European Center for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), “Despite the recession, Member States and social partners seem committed to developing skills” (2009):
- To assist people from vulnerable social groups and marginal social contexts
- To facilitate the development and transfer of innovative practices in Adult Education
- To support the development of ICT-based practices for lifelong learning and

- To improve pedagogical approaches and the management of Adult Education organizations.

In order to implement the previously referred to specific operational objectives, the European Union has placed emphasis on a number of supported Actions described as practical learning for adults in the article on Grundtvig (2009:2):

- Mobility including trainee visits, placements and ‘assistantships’ in institutions in which they are likely to be granted the opportunity to gain valuable experience thus developing their skills. It is a true fact that “The movement of people for work, study, family purposes, and retirement can yield a variety of benefits to the citizens and countries of Europe” (Benton & Petrovic, 2013:2) such as more efficient labor markets, increased cultural exchanges, better-trained workers, and the opportunity for citizens to broaden their horizons.
- Adult Education exchanges in the form of staff training and professional development
- Grundtvig learning partnerships focusing on topics of mutual interest to the participating organizations
- Multilateral projects for improving Adult Education systems through the development and transfer of innovation and good practice
- Grundtvig network of experts and organizations working on developing Adult Education, spreading good practices and supporting partnerships.

In addition to the above mentioned supported Actions, an overview of the New Grundtvig Actions, as initially issued in the conference for Intercultural Dialogue by the Finnish National Agency (CIMO, 2008:1) and began its implementation in the beginning of 2009, is worth mentioning. These Actions practically include the following:

- Work-related visits and exchanges for staff to Adult Education organizations in another Lifelong Learning Program (LLL) country
- Assistantships in the form of mobility for senior citizens
- Senior volunteering projects which is a new form of mobility for seniors aged 50 or above
- Workshops relating to learner-centered intensive courses for small groups of adult learners, 10-20 participants in which the topic is open, for example visual art, music, creativity, language learning and other.

3.2 Grundtvig Learning Partnerships: A Lifelong Learning Challenge.

As illustrated in the previous section, the Grundtvig Action as part of the European Union’s Lifelong Learning Program **to boost European finance** is in absolute alignment with the European Commission’s ‘Investment Efficiency’ indicator for the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy parameters. The term ‘Investment Efficiency’, coined by the EU clearly from the economic sector, leads to the research study by two American economists, Lepak & Snell (2002) who have elaborated on the notions of Human Capital and Employment defining the term ‘Knowledge-based Employment’. Ever since, this term has been utilized to illustrate the fact that “when human capital is both valuable and unique, it represents the knowledge base” around which different educational and/or organizations of different orientation are most likely to build their strategies (Lepak & Snell, 2002:520). Practically speaking, these people who constitute the ‘knowledge base’ of an organization actually “use their heads more than their hands to produce value” (ibid).

In relation to the above described economic notions frequently used by the EU in Communications Documents to define certain parameters so as to be more effectively put in practice, as stated in the 2004 Communication by the EU, “it is important to invest efficiently in human Capital”. There is evidence that resources spent on education and training can be considered an investment, since they yield returns in the future. It is currently urgent, due to the economic crisis worldwide, that “the education and training sector use the pressure on finance to encourage an as efficient as possible distribution and use of resources, and to achieve the highest levels of quality.”

3.2.1 Learning Partnerships and their Intercultural Dimension

Grundtvig Learning Partnerships constitute a major division in the context of the Lifelong Learning Program. The reason for this is their special asset to bring a European dimension to organizations directly involved in Adult Education (CIMO, 2008:5). In addition, they seem to be a ‘first taste of Europe’ for many of the above mentioned organizations while at the same time practitioners develop sustainable networks of professionals for exchanging experience and improving practice; what is more, Learning Partnerships (LPs) appear to foster social cohesion and intercultural dialogue thus contributing to a Europe of active citizens.

Before continuing to mention some of the intercultural themes frequently dealt with in a Learning Partnership (LP), it would be useful to elaborate on what exactly is meant by the term ‘intercultural dialogue’; it is a “process that comprises an open and respectful exchange or interaction between individuals, groups and organizations with different cultural backgrounds or world views” (European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research, 2008:12). Its aims are to develop a deeper understanding of diverse practices, increased participation along with the freedom and ability to make choices, foster equality and enhance creative processes (ibid)

Within the above stated framework, intercultural topics found in a (n) LP seem to be summarized into developing a multicultural working environment, strengthening active citizenship among minorities, promoting integration of immigrants in the labor market, improving the quality of Adult Education for minorities including people with borderline intelligence and/or learning difficulties, developing in-service training for educating ethnic minorities, enhancing the dialogue between minorities and the majority population as well as promoting intercultural dialogue as a learning element in teaching adults.

3.2.2 Practicalities of Grundtvig Learning Partnerships

In addition to the empowerment of the European Finance, the Grundtvig Action is likely to contribute to promoting an integrated social model, including such activities as preparatory visits, exchanges, assistantships, in-service training, workshops, Senior Volunteering projects, Multilateral projects and networks along with Learning Partnerships (CIMO, 2008:3) In the above frame, the Grundtvig Learning Partnership according to the European Commission (2009:1) “is a framework for small-scale cooperation activities between organizations working in the field of Adult Education in the broadest sense”. It focuses more on the process rather than the product of learning aiming at broadening the participation of smaller organizations that wish to include a European orientation in their educational activities.

In agreement with the European Commission’s instructions (ibid), in a Grundtvig Learning Partnership (LP), trainers and trainees from at least three participating countries work together on one or more topics of mutual interest. This exchange of experiences, practices and methods, i.e. one person learning from the other, contributes to an awareness of the European cultural, social and economic diversity and leads to a better understanding of common areas of interest within adult learning. In the case of a Grundtvig Learning Partnership (LP), one of the participating organizations is required to act as the coordinator. However, all participating institutions ought to monitor and evaluate their transnational work (European Commission, “Lifelong Learning Program – Grundtvig Actions – Learning Partnerships”, 2009:1) as well as relate it with initiatives of their local community, i.e. organizations and authorities at the national level in order to create possibilities for dissemination of results and promote the circulation of good practice.

Within the framework of a Learning Partnership (LP), the following activities are likely to be supported (CIMO, 2008:1-2): Partner meetings and seminars, exchanges of staff and adult learners, experience and good practice using communication technologies (websites, e-mail, video-conferencing), drawings and arts projects, fieldwork, project research theatrical performances and many more.

3.2.3 Implications of an implemented Grundtvig Learning Partnership

During the planning stage of a Grundtvig Learning Partnership (LP), the participating institutions are obliged to firstly decide on their thematic orientation, in other words the topic they wish to deal with. They must then determine their objectives, i.e. in which direction their decisions are going to lead the partners and consequently what the outcome of their achievements will be. In the next stage, the participants (staff, learners or both) are called upon to make decisions regarding the role each organization aspires to assume (CIMO, 2008:6). In turn, the general work plan, the number of individuals who will travel for the purposes of the project, the budget, the final distribution of tasks, the cooperation as well as communication and evaluation have to be determined. Indication of a sound planning phase thus becomes evident in the project application as well as the expected results.

In the framework of a Greek alternative secondary school for individuals over 18 years old who had, at some stage in their lives, abandoned secondary school education, a Grundtvig Learning Partnership featuring methods of sustainable development was implemented (cultivating and sustaining the terrace greenhouse for the purposes of the learning partnership project, created on the roof of the building of an alternative school for adults). In this Partnership, as described in Anagnostopoulou & Athanasiou (2013: 213, 214), an English taught workshop was designed and conducted at the particular alternative school with a view to enhancing learners’ overall effectiveness in English communication with the learners from the corresponding schools in other EU nations participating in the institutional partnership.

In the light of the survey elaborated in the conducted research, the alternative institution learners were asked to express their views on a number of issues pertaining to the use of the English language in a European multicultural socioeconomic environment. The findings that were derived depicted impressive results in terms of learners' ranking of English language learning (80% of the learners positioned English as a subject of primary importance). On the other hand, when learners were asked to assess their command of spoken English, this was not positioned high by them in the rank (only 30% believed that their oral competence level could be described as 'quite good') while many of them stated that the internet had facilitated them greatly (50% stated they could manage communication in English via internet social networking).

4. Discussion

The purpose of the present research constitutes an endeavor to explore the implications of implementing parameters of the Lifelong Learning Program in Adult Education with specific reference to training learners via the 'Grundtvig' action within the broader scope of creating a modernized European Social Model of a 'knowledge economy' through innovative practices. In this context which will be supportive towards its citizens, in particular such vulnerable groups as elderly people, women, migrants and the disabled, in terms of full employment opportunities as well as more efficient Education and Training, European Lifelong learning policies have been examined by presenting, in detail, the Grundtvig action along with its sub-division, namely the learning partnerships, all under the umbrella of the Lifelong Learning Program (LLL). An example of a Grundtvig Learning Partnership, put into effect in the environment of an alternative institution for adults endeavoring to achieve more effective communication in English in the process of completing Secondary Education, was presented.

A discussion of the Lisbon Strategy as well as the corresponding principles of Adult Education and Training within European policies, in essence have constituted the scope of this research paper. Having analyzed European principles about employment and growth, in relation to the adult student-participant profile, the Grundtvig program and its structure as a Lifelong Learning Program action have been presented further elaborating on the reasons for which Learning Partnerships are likely to have a positive impact in educating adults in Europe. The results of a conducted Grundtvig Learning Partnership indicating the degree to which Adult Education and Training constitutes a decisive European Policy is sound evidence of the new European Strategy named 'Europe 2020'.

The new strategy 'Europe 2020' is the successor of the Lisbon Strategy; however, it aims at further developing the aforementioned tendency for employment and growth in order to "tackle an unprecedented economic crisis" (European Commission – Directorate General for Education and Culture, 2013:1). In addition, the Europe 2020 strategy has rendered education as an essential force for growth and a key instrument for addressing issues such as unemployment, globalization and the knowledge economy. In the context of competing in the global economy through cutting-edge technology and the development of new products, the European Union needs to further reinforce all policy sectors in general and higher education, vocational as well as Adult Education and training which undoubtedly all play a significant role in the creation of a highly productive workforce.

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- the colleagues of the alternative school who provided assistance by hosting students and instructors from the corresponding European institutions – participants of the Grundtvig Learning partnership

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Notes

Note 1. Investment Efficiency is explained in the Communication of the EU as “making best use of resources” in terms of time and money in education and training (Commission of the European Communities, 2004:5)

Note 2. Knowledge-based Employment is a term that is derived from the economic sector meaning that when human capital is both valuable and unique, it represents the knowledge base around which firms are most likely to build their strategies. These employees are those most likely to represent a firm’s knowledge workers - those “people who use their heads more than their hands to produce value” (Lepak & Snell, 2002:520)

Note 3. Mobility is viewed as the transnational journey taken by the individual for his/her learning - training purposes which contributes to the feeling of belongingness to a European community and to the development of a European consciousness; it enhances the professional and personal skills of its citizenry; and it consequently increases the competitiveness of the European economy in relation to the rest of the world. Mobility also has the potential to equip people with the confidence and skills to live together in multi-ethnic and multi-lingual societies – both in Europe as a whole as well as within their own countries.

Note 4. Key Competencies refer to the competencies perceived as indispensable for the European citizenry in the attainment of personal fulfillment and development and of social inclusion and employability. (Commission of the European Communities, 2004:5)