

Freedom and Responsibility in Liberal Adult Education*) (SVV)

□ *RESEARCH PROJECT*

2011 – 2014

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*) *sivistystyö/bildningsarbete/Bildungsarbeit/Edification work*

1. There is a need for research on liberal adult education

About 1.6 million people participate in adult education in Finland, with more than a million in voluntary studies at liberal adult education institutes. Although voluntary studies are only marginally recognized in educational politics, they affect a large number of citizens. Surveys have been conducted about the importance of voluntary study for motivation, well-being and maintaining equity and civil society (e.g. Manninen & Luukannel 2008), and participants and professionals in liberal adult education institutes also have significant experiential knowledge about the impacts of these activities. However, currently research on liberal adult education is scarce, which the liberal adult education institutes and associations consider as a fundamental deficiency. They would declare a need for research-based knowledge firstly to respond to challenges in their environment, and also to defend and legitimize their activities in educational policy discussions and in their struggle for public resources at national and local levels. A third reason for this research is their need to critically reflect on their work and on the factors which influence it (Heikkinen & Teräsahde 2011.)

Since the 1980s and 90s, liberal adult education has tried to cope with diminishing public support and tightening controls, as well as with increasing competition in education markets. At the same time it has also tried to maintain its tradition of voluntary studies. During the new millennium the state launched political programmes and measures which increasingly directed liberal adult education and its focus through (for example) so-called direction-line funding and study vouchers, and with the programme for development of liberal adult education (KEHO 2009 – 2012) which included reforms on legislation, financing and structure. The Finnish population is aging, and migrating from rural to urban areas; the amount of immigrants is growing, municipal service structure is being rationalized, use of ICT is spreading, and the staffs in liberal adult education institutes are being renewed. In the 2011 government programme, liberal adult education was also tasked with taking care of those outside formal education, and for the domestication of immigrants. Therefore, there are a variety of developments that directly influence the aims, content, methods, structures, frameworks and identity of liberal adult education institutes and to the qualification requirements and well-being of their staff.

During the 2000s the Ministry of Education and Culture carried out evaluations on the structures, services and efficiency of liberal adult education institutes, and on the qualification levels and working-conditions of their staff (Vaherva et al 2006, Vaherva et al 2007, Poikela et al 2009). The results of these evaluations have been used to guide policy, for example with the aims and measures included in KEHO programme. The structures and funders of adult education centres are also due to be evaluated during 2011-12 by the Finnish Education Evaluation Council.

The limited research on liberal adult education has been fragmentary in nature, and often based on individual dissertations. Systematically gathering and strengthening this research, and bringing liberal adult education back into academic degree studies, will require closer collaboration amongst universities and also between universities and actors of liberal adult education.

2. The aims of the project

The main aim of the project is to clarify the **missions, methods, meanings** and **agency** in liberal adult education, in relation to its transforming **societal-historical** context. Furthermore, it aims to analyze **relationships** between actors in governance, policy, research and liberal adult education, and to make

recommendations for their development. Lastly, the project will aim to develop collaboration models for sustainable **academic research and studies** of liberal adult education in Finland.

Before 1998 there was no comprehensive definition of liberal adult education, which would help legitimize its state support. During the past hundred years folk high schools, workers' and civic institutes (now adult education centres), study associations, summer universities and sport institutes have developed their own distinctive aims, methods and networks. Furthermore, separate teacher, principal, and advisory trainings have enforced the diversity of their self-understanding. 'Liberal adult education' has, therefore, developed into an internally multi-faceted and tense field, where communality between organisations has primarily emerged as a defence against external enemies, for example when having to compete to maintain their status against vocational adult education.

The first forum for negotiations between leaders of state administration and liberal adult education organizations was the Folk Education Council, established after World War II in 1946 (after 1985 known as the Adult Education Council, and since 2010 the Council for Lifelong Learning). Some organizations also came together for mutual negotiations into the Finnish Association for Liberal Adult Education in 1969. In the beginning of organized liberal adult education, representatives from universities and different disciplines had a crucial role in defining its meanings. This was enabled by the close personal networks between academics and leaders of state administration and liberal adult education organizations and by early training of the staff in universities (since 1927 within the School of Social Sciences, later developing into University of Tampere from 1960).

Although the vocabulary of liberal adult education has contained many layers since its beginnings, the content of the discussion have been significantly varied. Institutionalization and dependency on public funding have promoted discursive eclecticism, which can be positively interpreted as expressing the flexibility of liberal adult education towards its changing environment. As new actors have come along, activities have expanded and settled into part of the educational system, and universities and researchers have moved away from trying to form definitions of liberal adult education. In the 1998 Act the state is not only defining what liberal adult education is, but is also setting out its aims in different fields of action. Currently, in order to be recognized as liberal adult education, activities should be organized "following the principle of lifelong learning, to support societal coherence, equality and active citizenship". Liberal adult education should "aim at many-sided development of individuals, well-being and democracy, at implementation of sustainable development, multi-culturality and internationalization" (L 2009). At the same time the legislator – as funder – pressurises the actors of liberal adult education towards reaching these aims and goals.

The dominant interpretation of the societal-historical context, which is challenging Finnish liberal adult education, is expressed in the programme for development of liberal adult education (KEHO 2009-12), agreed by the Ministry of Education and Culture. According to KEHO, the main challenges are: demographic and labour market change; economic recession; progress of ICT; reforms in municipal and public service structure, state financing and regional governance, vocational institute strategy, and vocational adult education and higher education policies, as well as new practices in the recognition of prior learning. Additional challenges are the rising costs of education, the economic problems of education providers, increasing competition for resources and the growing heterogeneity of students (OPM 2009). It is assumed that liberal adult education institutes are able to respond to these challenges, while their finance systems, structures, quality and efficiency are reformed. This is enabled by steering them with state-sponsored programmes for development of competences of their staff (OSAAVA 2010-2016), and for rewarding institutes for developing their quality (LAKE) (see Poikela et al. 2009). Implementation of both programmes

are conditioned by reforms in municipal structures and financing systems, which has led to many mergers between liberal adult education organizations, and also with other educational organizations. Moving funding for study associations partly into state support for parties has also been on the agenda. Although education of liberal adult educators is still following general pedagogical studies for (all) teachers (60 ECSTS full-time), there are strong programmes to shape it according to the EQF framework and to support EU policies of lifelong learning and to develop European professionals in adult learning (Alpine 2009, Key Competences 2010).

Therefore, the SVV-project is asking how the mission, methods, meanings and agency are being transformed in liberal adult education, and what the consequences are to personal, collective and meta-collective adulthood both in Finland and in a wider international context.

3. Preliminary research design

The project builds on previous collaboration between liberal adult education organizations and researchers, and also on less extensive collaboration between administration and researchers. Groups of researchers from different universities have been participating for over a decade in the programme *Competence and Qualifications in Liberal Adult Education* (VSOP), coordinated by the FAEA (VSY). Researchers have also developed a research programme *Popular Education in Movement* (Kansan Sivistys Liikkeessä), which has been implemented on a small scale (Heikkinen et al 2003). One of the main outcomes of the project is a research and writing project *Fields and Layers of Finnish Adult Education* (SAKKE), which is publishing four volumes produced by more than 40 researchers. Another important outcome was the Structural Innovations for Research Collaboration in Adult Education (AITURI) projects, which is leading to regional, national and international research networks in different action fields within adult education (Heikkinen et al 2011). The programme for the development of liberal adult education (KEHO) also includes an initiative for a "multidisciplinary research programme for liberal adult education, which would aim at strengthening academic studies, research and research training, and activate collaboration and interaction between universities and liberal adult education actors" which should be launched during 2010 (OPM 2009, 102).

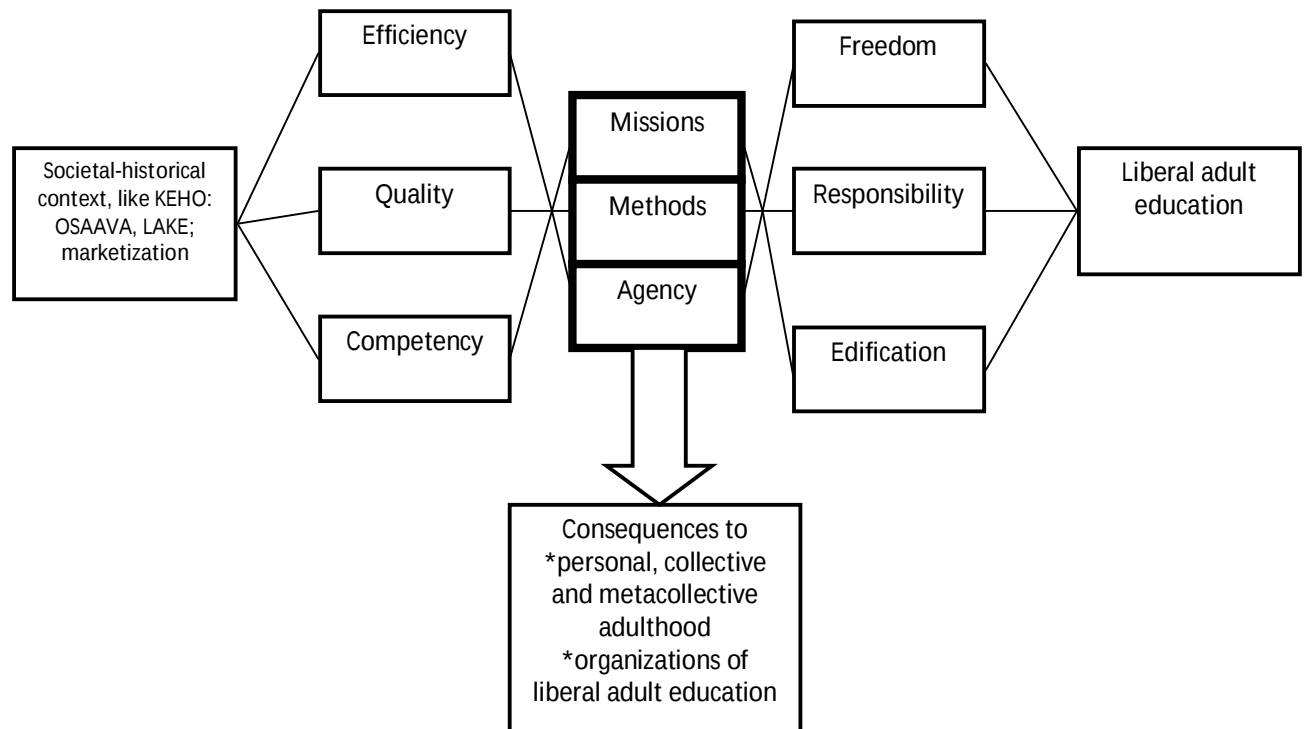
In the SVV project, the distinctiveness of liberal adult education is considered to crystallize in its missions, methods, meanings and agency, which actualize **edification**, **freedom** and **responsibility**.¹ The transforming societal-historical context is focused on the implementation of the national programme for development of liberal adult education (KEHO 2009 – 2012), and its crucial definitions of quality and efficiency (LAKE) and of competency (OSAAVA). These are related to current changes in municipality structures and financing, which condition the execution of the KEHO programme. Central research questions are:

1. How is edification, freedom and responsibility expressed within the missions, methods and agency of liberal adult education?
2. How is quality, efficiency and competency expressed in the implementation of the KEHO-programme. In the LAKE- and OSAAVA-programmes, and in solutions about municipality structures and financing, which are conditioning them?
3. How is quality, efficiency and competency expressed within the missions, methods, meanings and agency of liberal adult education?

¹ The Finnish category "sivistys" is translated here as "edification", although idea-historically and practically it has strong relations to categories of "bildning" and "Bildung" in Swedish and German. This is because "sivistys" literally means making something smooth, neat, pretty, better.

4. How do interpretations of edification, freedom and responsibility relate to interpretations of quality, efficiency and competency in the missions, methods, meanings and agency of liberal adult education?
5. What consequences do the above-mentioned have for liberal adult education organizations and for adulthood in its personal, collective and meta-collective meanings?

Figure 1. Preliminary research design of the SVV-project.



4. Methodological starting points

The aim of the SVV-project is to make concrete the research design and questions, and to carry out research in collaboration with actors in liberal adult education (hopefully also administration and policy making), and universities at a national and regional level. The research process should be characterized by a firm dialogue between theory and practice, and by continuously moving between theorizing and experiential-empirical activities. On the one hand, the process might be considered as **joint research**, where capacities of researchers and so-called lay people are joined in developing knowledge. The challenge in such research is getting across both the knowledge embedded in local practices, and theoretical knowledge, and recognising their differences and oppositions (e.g. Vähämäki 2010). On the other hand, research might be characterized as **action research** or **developmental evaluation** where researchers, together with other actors, deconstruct and make visible meanings embedded in documents, programmes, practices and experiences, which are related to the missions, methods and agency in liberal adult education. At the same time they reflect on new, alternative interpretations and their practical consequences (e.g. Heikkinen & Lamminpää 2002, Kemmis & Wilkinson 1998; Manninen & Kauppi 2008.).

The research process will also be multi-layered, multi-methodical and meta-analytical. Responses to research questions will be investigated by analyzing and synthesizing individual researches which may differ in thematic, methodical and local focus, for example by analyzing documents or web-materials, through surveys and interviews with different actors, and by observation and discussions.

5. Work-plan and partnership

Until now researchers from the University of Tampere, the University of Eastern Finland, Åbo Akademi University, and the FAEA (VSY) have committed to the *Freedom and Responsibility in Liberal Adult Education* project. Although the project will be shaped according to the expectations and needs of the different actors involved, the university researchers will be responsible for its scientific content. However, researchers in other universities and other actors in liberal adult education, administration and policy-making are also welcome to join the project.

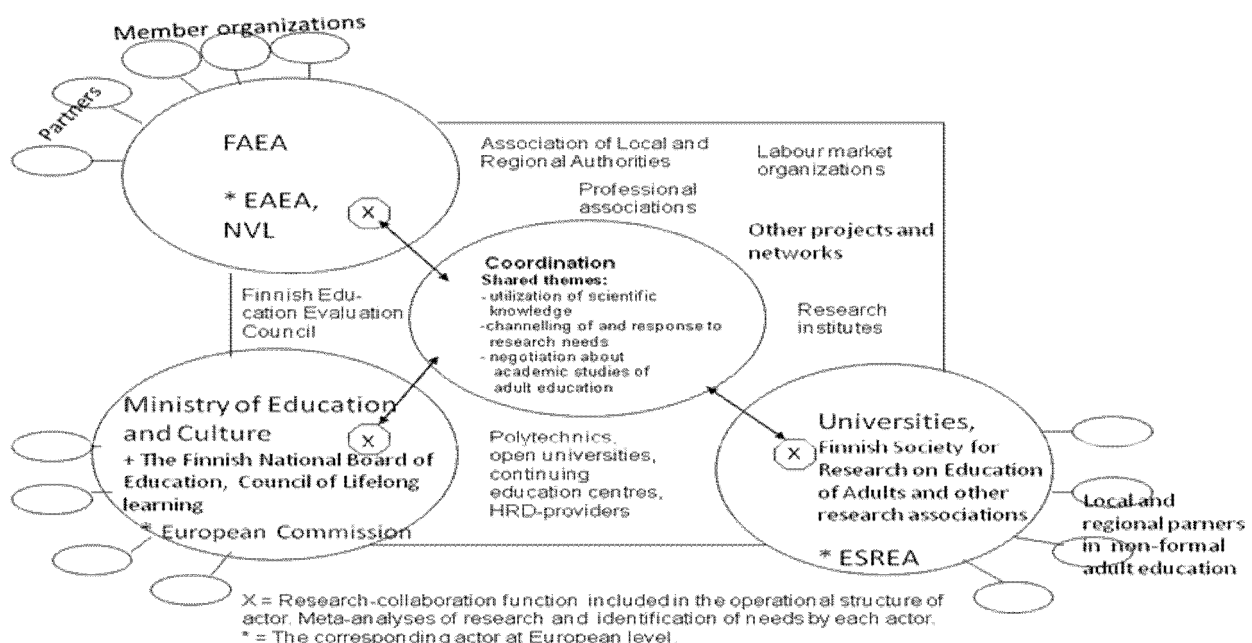
At a national level, synthesizing and meta-analytical work, and reporting on and rooting developed collaboration models in practice, is the responsibility of a co-ordination group of the SVV-project representing the FAEA and researchers (optionally also administration and policy-making). The FAEA is responsible for mobilizing its member associations and regional actors into the project, while the researchers are responsible for guiding the research activities, supervision and research training.

At a regional level, researchers in the universities will co-ordinate the implementation of the SVV-project and mediate between regional and national activities, promoting collaboration between researchers and actors in liberal adult education, recruiting and supervising the researchers and eventually synthesizing and reporting on the results.

The national co-ordination group is responsible for the integration and promotion of the SVV-project with Nordic and European actors in liberal adult education (optionally also administration and policy-making) (like the NVL, or the EAEA), and with Nordic and European research networks (e.g. the Nordic co-ordination group for conferences in adult learning, and ESREA – History of Adult Education and Training, Active Citizenship, Professionalization of Adult Education).

Collaboration activities are building on the model that was developed in the AITURI-project (figure 2). At this stage the SVV-project partnership consists of the FAEA and three universities.

Figure 2. Suggestion for a model for research collaboration in adult education (Heikkinen & Teräsahde 2011)



5.1. Finnish Adult Education Association (FAEA, VSY)

The FAEA is an association for collaboration between central associations of liberal adult education. Its function is to sustain and develop their activities by influencing educational policy-making and decisions and by promoting research in liberal adult education. Its members are the Union of Adult Education Centres, the Folk High School Association, the Society for Folk Enlightenment, the OK-study centre, Study Associations, the Settlement Union, the Sport Institute Association, the Summer University Association, and the Friends of Swedish Folk Schools (Swedish).

The FAEA functions as a central point of connection between universities and actors in liberal adult education, and as so:

- organizes associations for collaboration,
- disseminates research topics to universities,
- mobilizes regional actors and maintains contacts to universities,
- maintains Nordic and international contacts to the NVL and EAEA,
- organizes meetings, seminars and conferences which bring researchers, practitioners, policy-makers and administrators, together with partner universities,
- informs about research seminars and conferences,
- disseminates research results, and
- maintains a website/portal for research on liberal adult education.

The contact person is Ms. MA Leena Saloheimo.

During 2001-2010 the FAEA has supported research with a focus on liberal adult education in different universities; many of these also connect to the themes of the SVV project.

5.2. School of Education in the University of Tampere (UTA)

- Professor, Ms. Anja Heikkinen
- Contact person, doctoral candidate, Ms. Sini Teräsahde
- Ms. BA/MA Jenni Pätäri
- Ms. BA Kaisa Lappalainen, Ullastiina Hankala, Maija Melentjeff
- Other MA/PhD students and postdoctoral researchers
- Regional actors in liberal adult education

Main approaches: transforming relations between education, work and politics, historicizing and cultural contextualization, educatorship; collaboration (e.g. with ESREA's History of adult education), Active Citizenship and Professionalization of Adult Educators research networks.

Examples of current research themes:

- Fields and layers of Finnish adult education (responsible researchers Anja Heikkinen, Jukka Tuomisto, Risto Rinne, Arto Jauhiainen, Mauri Nest, Kari Kantasalmi, Eeva Kallio)
- Trans-nationalization of Qualification Frameworks: Educational Implications (Anja Heikkinen and research group)
- Actor networks and collaboration in adult education (Sini Teräsahde)
- Presentations of liberal adult education organizations: historicizing analysis (Jenni Pätäri)
- Meaning of OSAAVA-programme for adult education centres (Kaisa Lappalainen)
- From ethos to continuous change: transformation of occupational identity of adult education centre principals (Mauri Nest)
- Emotions in work of liberal adult education teachers (Ullastiina Hankala)

5.3 Department of Education and Psychology in the University of Eastern Finland (UEF)

- Contact person professor, Mr. Jyri Manninen
- Researcher, Dr., Mr. Juha Kauppila
- Doctoral candidate, Mr. Ari Sivenius
- Doctoral candidate, Ms. Emilia Valkonen
- MA/PhD students
- Regional actors of liberal adult education

Ongoing projects and research:

In the strategy of the department of education and psychology, the SVV-projects fits in with the theme "Learning society, citizenship and liberal adult education":

- Seasons of generations (Juha Kauppila)
- Work-career and promotion of agency: transitions in life-course and chains of generations (Juha Kauppila)
- Nordic comparison between educational practices sustaining welfare-society (Jyri Manninen)
- Wider benefits of liberal adult education (Jyri Manninen)
- Marketization in adult education centres (Emilia Valkonen)
- Adult gymnasium in our time: meaning and mission of folk high school gymnasium (Ari Sivenius)

5.4 Vasa Unit of Åbo Akademi University (ÅBO)

- Contact person professor, Mr. Petri Salo
- Ms. PhD, Renata Svedlin
- Doctoral candidate, Ms. Pia Nordin
- Doctoral candidate, Mr. Jari Sarja
- Ms. BA Annika Turunen
- Regional actors in liberal adult education

Ongoing projects and research:

- Meaning of liberal adult education (Petri Salo)
- Leadership in folk high schools (Renata Svedlin)
- Regional rupture in value-basis, activity and identity of liberal adult education (Pia Nordin)
- Recognition and development of work and teaching methods in liberal adult education (Jari Sarja)
- Mission, target groups and collaboration in liberal adult education at local level (Annika Turunen)

5. Timetable and funding

At this stage the timetable of the SVV-project is outlined for the end of 2011 and for the years 2012-2014. After this the project will be evaluated and decisions about its continuation made.

	Steps forward	National events	International events
6–12/2011	• Agreement between the FAEA and universities • Organization of the co-ordination group: specifying the work-plan and establishing the SVV-portal • Applications for funding • Mobilization of FAEA member associations and regional actors • Establishment of regional research groups • Project meeting for specifying	• Research meeting in liberal adult education 6/2011 (Jyväskylä) • Educational research conference 11/2011 (Joensuu) • Nordic research meeting in liberal adult education 8.-9.12.2011 (Helsinki) • Events in liberal adult education institutes	• Nordic Adult Education Conference, Trondheim 4/2011 • ESREA History and Citizenship --seminar 6/2011 (Budapest) • ESREA Professionalization of Adult Educators –seminar 11/2011 (Tallinn) • International events of adult education institutes (EAEA...)

	- research design, methodology and implementation - Establishment of international contacts		
2012	- Launching regional research collaboration - Meta-analysis of relevant national research - Regional, national, international applications for funding - Project meeting: follow up of regional research - Developing international contacts and research designs	- SVV- research meeting - Adult education research conference 16.-17.2.2012 (Helsinki) - Events of liberal adult education institutes - History of education meeting 6/2012 (Joensuu, theme edification work)	- ESREA networks' seminars - International events of adult education institutes (EAEA...) ...
2013	- Regional research in full speed - Project meeting: collection and follow up of regional research - Sustaining international contacts and research collaboration	- SVV- research meeting - Events of liberal adult education institutes ...	- Nordic Adult Education conference (Reykjavik) - ESREA networks' seminars (+ triennial conference) - International events of adult education institutes (EAEA...) ...
2014	- Summarizing regional research and starting new researches - Project meeting: meta-analysis of regional research, international contextualization - Summarizing findings, conclusions and reporting - Information and dissemination of results - Evaluation of collaboration model: rooting and revising the project - Action and funding plans for future	- SVV- research meeting - Adult education research conference 2/2014 - Events in liberal adult education institutes ...	- ESREA networks' seminars - International events of adult education institutes (EAEA...) ...

The funding of the SVV-project during 2012 – 2014 includes grants and subsidies applied to the whole project and for individual researchers (Foundations, Ministry of Education and Culture, Universities, Liberal Adult Education Associations, Municipalities, Finnish Academy), and also a co-ordination subsidy from Ministry of Education and Culture.

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Agreement of project partners

The FAEA, University of Tampere, University of Eastern Finland and Åbo Akademi University have committed to promote and implement *Freedom and Responsibility of Liberal Adult Education* during 2011 and 2012. The agreement has been signed by Eeva-Inkeri Sirelius (VSY), Anja Heikkinen (UTA), Jyri Manninen (UEF) and Petri Salo (ÅBO).