



# Learning outside the school walls

**One of the main themes of the “Innovative Learning Forum“ – held in June 2013 in Bratislava – was non-formal education. Since 2002, the EU has promoted the value of non-formal and informal learning for youth because there is great potential to achieve the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy through them. Let us explain what is this all about.**

The website of EU's Youth in Action Programme for the period 2007-2013 provides a readable explanation of the differences between learning in formal (e.g. school, university), non-formal (e.g. courses, sports club) and informal (e.g. from parents and friends) settings based on definitions from Lynne Chisholm, a professor at the University of Innsbruck, Austria:

**Formal learning** is purposive learning that takes place in an institutionalized environment specifically designed for teaching and learning, which is staffed by learning facilitators. Learning aims are almost always externally set; learning progress is usually monitored and assessed; and learning outcomes are usually recognized by certificates or diplomas. Much formal learning provision is compulsory (school education).

**Non-formal learning** is purposive but voluntary learning that takes place in a diverse range of environments for which teaching and learning is not necessarily their sole activity. The activities or courses may be staffed by professional learning facilitators or by volunteers. They are planned, but seldom conventionally structured; they usually address

specific target groups, but rarely document learning achievements in conventionally visible ways.

**Informal learning** is non-purposive learning which takes place in everyday life contexts in the family, at work, during leisure and in the community. It does have outcomes, but these are seldom recorded, virtually never certified and are typically neither immediately visible for the learner nor do they count in themselves for education, training or employment purposes.

The three-day international conference “Innovative Learning Forum“ aimed to support the potential of non-formal education in youth work and its interconnection to present-day challenges faced by young people. It also aimed to introduce new trends in non-formal education as well as to increase awareness of employers' requirements for potential employees, and how non-formal education in youth work helps in this area. The main sponsors of this event were IUVENTA – Slovak Youth Institute; the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic; EU's Youth in Action Programme; the Czech

National Youth Agency; the American Chamber of Commerce in the Slovak Republic; and Experiencia.

In particular, young people's high unemployment rate and low engagement are considered main challenges of the young generation, challenges that underline the significance of non-formal education. The formation of initiatives may help raise the profile and general acceptance of the obvious benefits that young people gain through participation in the activities of non-formal education.

One such initiative is the national Declaration of Recognition of the Contributions of Non-formal Education in Youth Work which was introduced to the public during the conference. The Declaration was signed by the Slovak Minister of Education, Dušan Čaplovič, and the Mayor of Bratislava, Milan Ftáčnik, the representatives of ministries, regional self-governments, non-governmental youth organizations, and employers. The signatories expressed their support of non-formal education in youth work, recognized its contribution to life-long learning, and supported the creation of new partnerships among various stakeholders within this area.

According to American writer and philosopher George Santayan, a child educated only at school is an uneducated child. AmCham Slovakia, in support of that philosophy, strives to inspire young people to better themselves outside the classroom. This

approach has proven beneficial for their future lives and careers. During discussion concerning this event, the Executive Director of AmCham, Jake Slegers, said, “Nobody can ever take from you what you already know. AmCham is therefore intensely devoted to education, either through its university oriented programs or through the 2012: Year of Education initiative.”

According to Ivana Molnárová, Executive Director of Profesia job portal, “By signing the Declaration on recognition of non-formal education, graduates' and young people's chances of gaining new work skills and the opportunity for their presentation can increase significantly, and through these they can enhance their chances on the labor market. Employers currently especially appreciate young people's ability to solve tasks independently, their ability to bring new creative views, to carry out tasks entrusted to them, and their ability to present these tasks. And it is just non-formal education that creates conventions to enable young people to gain these required skills.”

More than 40 organizations, institutions, and companies signed the declaration by the end of June 2013. The possibility to join the declaration and to raise the profile of the importance of this theme remains open to all companies operating in Slovakia. The act of signing the declaration should be a starting point for further initiatives, through which non-formal education will be promoted and recognized by an increasing number of stakeholders.



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The Declaration was signed by representatives of Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of SR; City of Bratislava; Československá obchodná banka; Dell; Hewlett-Packard Slovakia; Microsoft Slovakia; AmCham Slovakia; Emerson; Profesia; PosAm; Junior Achievement Slovensko; University of Žilina; United School of Novohradská; Children of Slovakia Foundation; Youth Council of Slovakia; Scouting Slovakia; and Experiencia.