



# SEEDS OF CHANGE

**Stories of Growth,  
Connection, and Change  
in Adult Education**

**EPALE Community  
Storybook 2024**



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The present Storybook is the result of contributions of 85 members of the EPALE community. The 2024 Edition of the EPALE Community Storybook was developed as part of the Community Stories initiative. EPALE is grateful to the many people who were involved in the process and enriched the platform with their experiences and passion.

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## FOREWORD



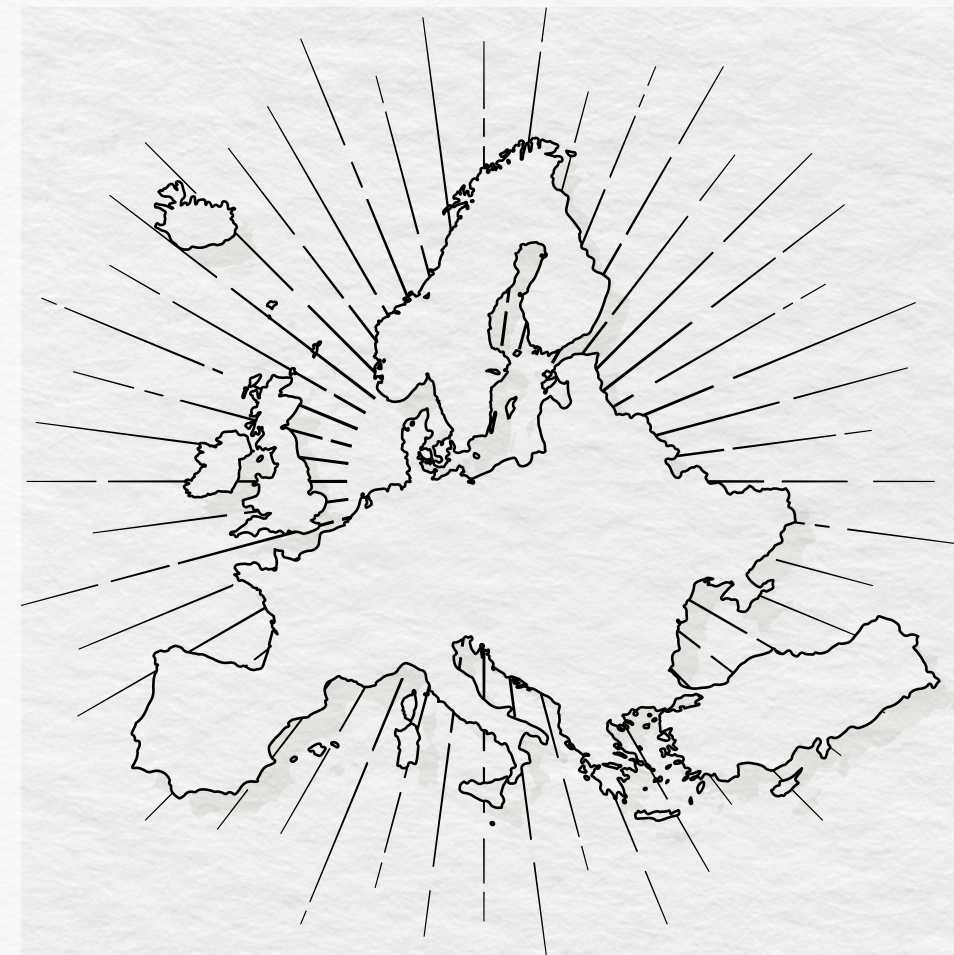
*Sophie Beernaerts*  
DIRECTOR OF EACEA

*The European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) manages the contracts of the EPALE Central Support Services and National Support Services, under the supervision of a Steering Committee that it chairs and which includes representatives of the Agency and the Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, as well as the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.*

We are delighted to introduce the **2024 edition of the EPALE Community Storybook**, focusing on the transformative power of learning and the unwavering commitment of adult educators and trainers.

The stories shine a spotlight on how adult learning goes beyond the acquisition of knowledge or skills—it is about empowering individuals, restoring a profound sense of belonging, and fostering a lifelong commitment to learning.

At the EU level, we are working towards empowering all adults to participate in learning and are striving to come closer to the EU target of at least 60% of all adults participating in training every year by 2030, as set out in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. I am pleased to note that the European Year of Skills has further boosted the attention to skills and adult learning. Skills development remains a top priority, with ongoing plans to create and strengthen a Union of Skills.



The contributions in this book showcase the powerful impact of adult learning in empowering individuals to navigate change effectively. These narratives examine how the pursuit of learning in adulthood represents not merely an educational activity, but a profound process of personal and social transformation.

The stories illustrate how learning can dismantle the intangible barriers that frequently impede adults, whether these are self-imposed limitations, socioeconomic constraints, or cultural obstacles. Each story demonstrates how learning serves as a catalyst for transformation, empowering individuals to rethink their roles in society and the workforce, and to reshape the narratives of their lives.

What renders the testimonies especially compelling is their ripple effect. The acquisition of new skills, knowledge and confidence by adults frequently results in their becoming agents of transformation within their families,

workplaces, and communities. From these stories, we can observe how their children witness the efficacy of lifelong learning, how their colleagues benefit from their enhanced capabilities, and how their communities gain more engaged and informed citizens.

The stories also illustrate instances of resilience, courage, and determination, and we encounter individuals who defied expectations, overcame obstacles, and emerged stronger through their learning journey. Their experiences highlight learning as a powerful equaliser and a driving force for social mobility, labour market integration and personal empowerment.

A heartfelt thank you to the contributors for sharing their inspiring stories and wishing readers an enjoyable experience.

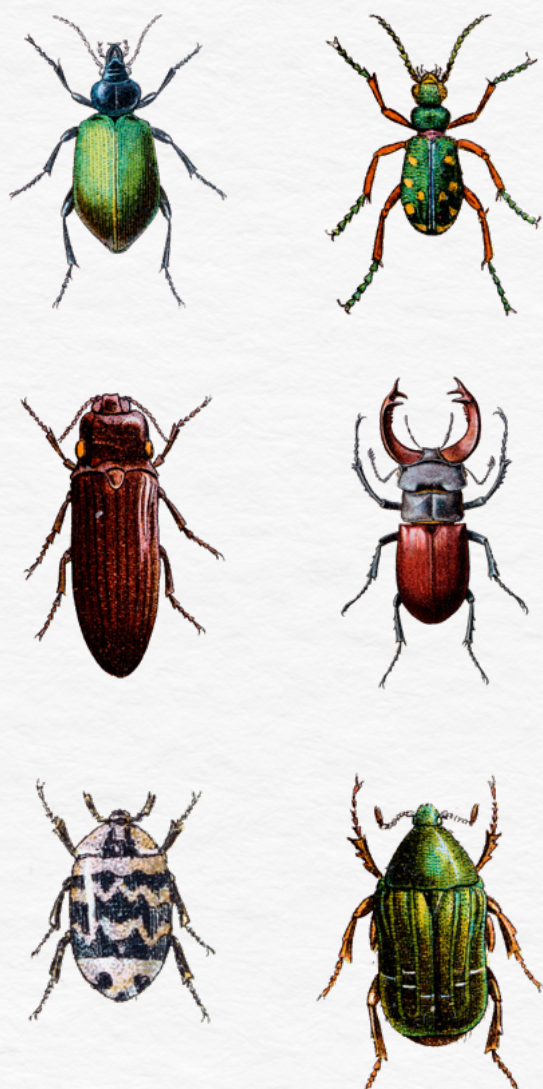
SOPHIE BEERNAERTS





# INTRODUCTION

## Stories of Growth and Discovery



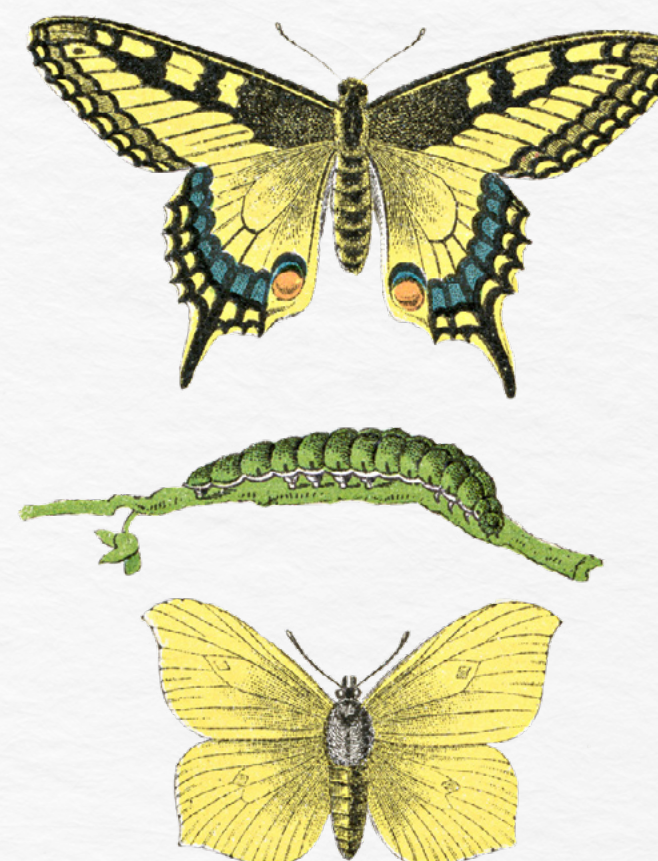
**Imagine an ancient naturalist's journal,** each story captured as if discovered in the wild. **Imagine being a botanist,** discovering the magic of the world for the first time, capturing every moment with scientific wonder and artistic grace.

Within the pages of the 2024 EPALE Community Storybook are over 80 remarkable stories from adult educators across Europe, each story carefully preserved like specimens in an antiquarian's journal. These stories of transformation, growth and discovery unfold like pressed flowers between the pages, creating a living document of how adult education continues to plant and nurture seeds of change across our continent.

Just as naturalists of old meticulously documented their findings, our educators have shared their experiences with remarkable depth and authenticity. Each story is a unique specimen in our collection - some rare and delicate, others hardy and resilient, but all essential to understanding the rich ecosystem of adult learning in Europe.

These stories reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary, just as a botanist might find wonder in the intricate patterns of a common leaf. From bustling city centres to remote rural communities, from digital classrooms to traditional learning spaces, they map the diverse terrain of adult learning across our continent. Each story tells of moments when knowledge took root, understanding blossomed and transformation bore fruit.

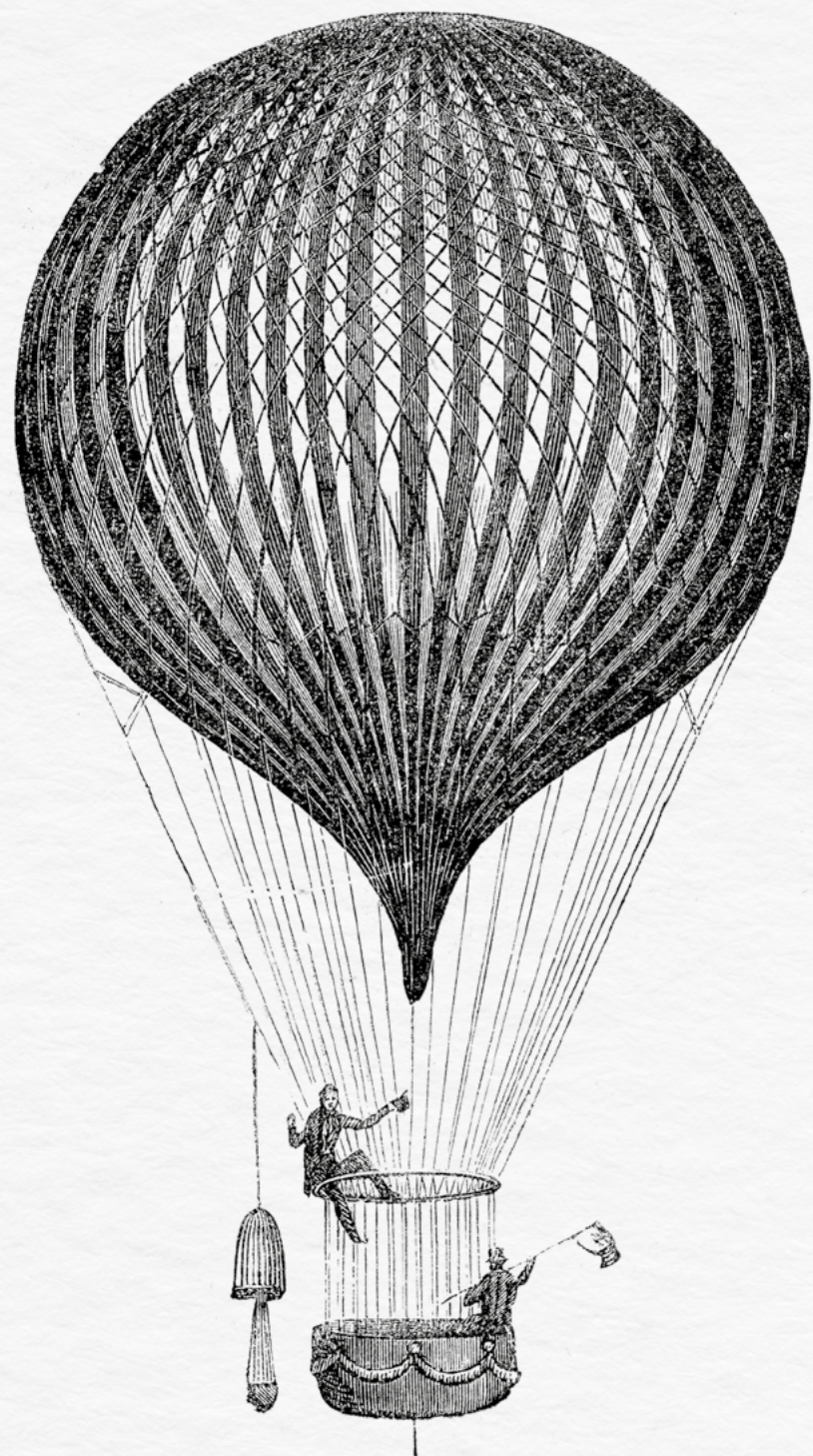
Like carefully annotated notes, these stories document the methods, challenges and breakthroughs that define adult learning. Some show the resilience of learners, like plants that thrive in unlikely places. Others highlight innovative teaching approaches that, like newly discovered species, expand our understanding of what's possible in adult education.



More than a collection of scenes and stories, it's a field guide to the transformative power of adult learning. Each contribution enriches our understanding of the boundless potential of education to transcend borders, cultures and generations.

We invite you to explore these pages with the same sense of wonder that drives both naturalists and educators - the joy of discovery, the thrill of understanding, and the profound satisfaction of sharing knowledge that can change lives.





## CHAPTER I

# PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH EDUCATION



Every journey begins with a single step. For some, it was the courage to return to school after decades away. For others, it was crossing borders with nothing but hope and determination. And for many, it was the moment they decided to share their knowledge with others, becoming the teachers they once needed themselves. In these pages, educators from across Europe share their remarkable journeys - stories of transformation, resilience, and discovery. Some found their calling in prison classrooms, others in community centers for migrants, or in digital literacy programs for older people. Each voice speaks of personal victories and professional revelations, of barriers overcome and bridges built. **These are not just stories about teaching and learning. They are chronicles of human connection, of lives intersecting in meaningful ways, of communities growing stronger through shared knowledge.** Above all, they remind us that education is a powerful force for change, capable of transforming not only individual lives but entire communities, one lesson at a time. As you turn these pages, you'll meet people who dared to reimagine their lives through learning, and in doing so, created ripples of change that continue to touch others. Their stories celebrate the extraordinary potential that lies within adult education - to awaken dreams, to forge new paths, and to build a more inclusive world.



## DANIJELA ZIVOJINOVIC

## ICELAND



"I spent my first year in Iceland working as an au pair in the countryside. The natural beauty of Iceland captivated me, but the culture was very different from what I was used to. I had to adapt to many things, such as the food, the language and the general lifestyle. When I first heard Icelandic, I couldn't even distinguish the sounds and thought I would never be able to learn the language. **Now I am a teacher, and teaching is a source of great satisfaction for me and is truly my 'dream job'. It is both rewarding and challenging.**"



*Dear Sir,  
 I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 11th inst. in reference to the copy of my new story (in Italian) of my being perfectly satisfied with*

## LUCIANA GONNELLA

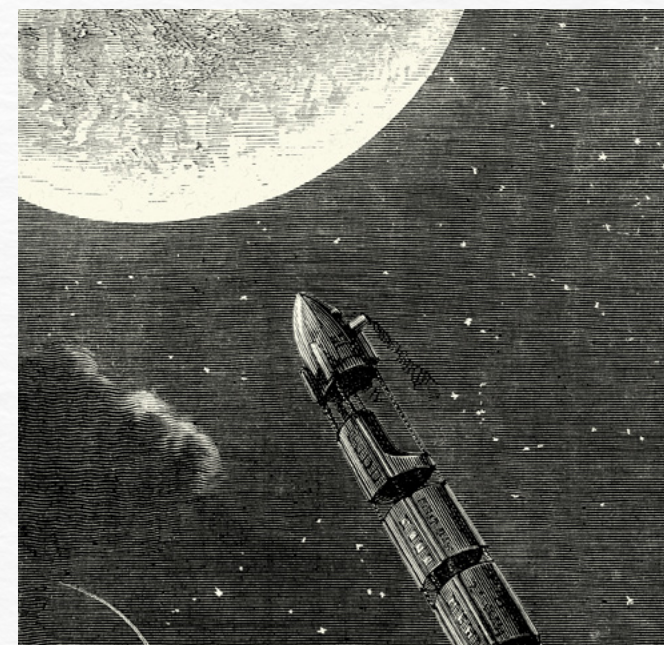
## ITALY

"I am Luciana and I live in a beautiful town in the province of Lucca, Barga, rich in art, culture and also a tourist destination for many foreigners. **As I approached retirement age, I thought it would be useful to bring myself up to date by going back to school.** At the end of 2019, I signed up for non-formal courses in English language and practical computing. Fantastic idea."

## ANDREJ VOLARIC

## CROATIA

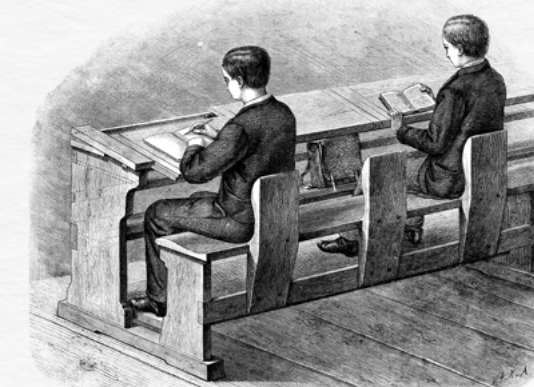
"Without a clear goal and vision of where I wanted to be in the future, I sent applications to job vacancies. Most of the time I received no reply or was turned down. **Then I started to think about furthering my education.** I wanted to learn new things, become competitive in the job market and enrich my CV. I found the adult education programme that suited me best and started attending. **It was then that I realised that any education is an investment in yourself.**"



## PATRIZIA MUGNAI

## ITALY

"Enrolling in the course allowed me to get back into the game, to start a new life. It was important to work with a group of adults who were still at school because it allowed me to hear different opinions, solve problems together and see things from different perspectives. **I found a group with whom I felt comfortable and who had the same goals as me: the desire to learn,** a teacher who always encouraged us to move forward despite the difficulties we might encounter."



## ROBERT BOSILJ

## CROATIA



"Throughout my business career, **I have progressed solely thanks to the skills I have tried to develop by investing in myself through lifelong learning,** reading a lot of literature, attending dozens of training courses, seminars and training sessions, and thanks to the results I have achieved together with my team. Of course, there has also been the necessary dose of luck, which is always needed in life on the road to success."



## SALIMATA SISSOKO

FRANCE



**“My life began in an unconventional way.** I was brought up by my mother’s older sister, who saw no point in sending me to school. The days went by, and as my friends left for school in the morning, I went with them and listened attentively through the window to what was being said in class. However, my biological mother finally decided to take me back and enrol me in school. It was a moment of joy.”

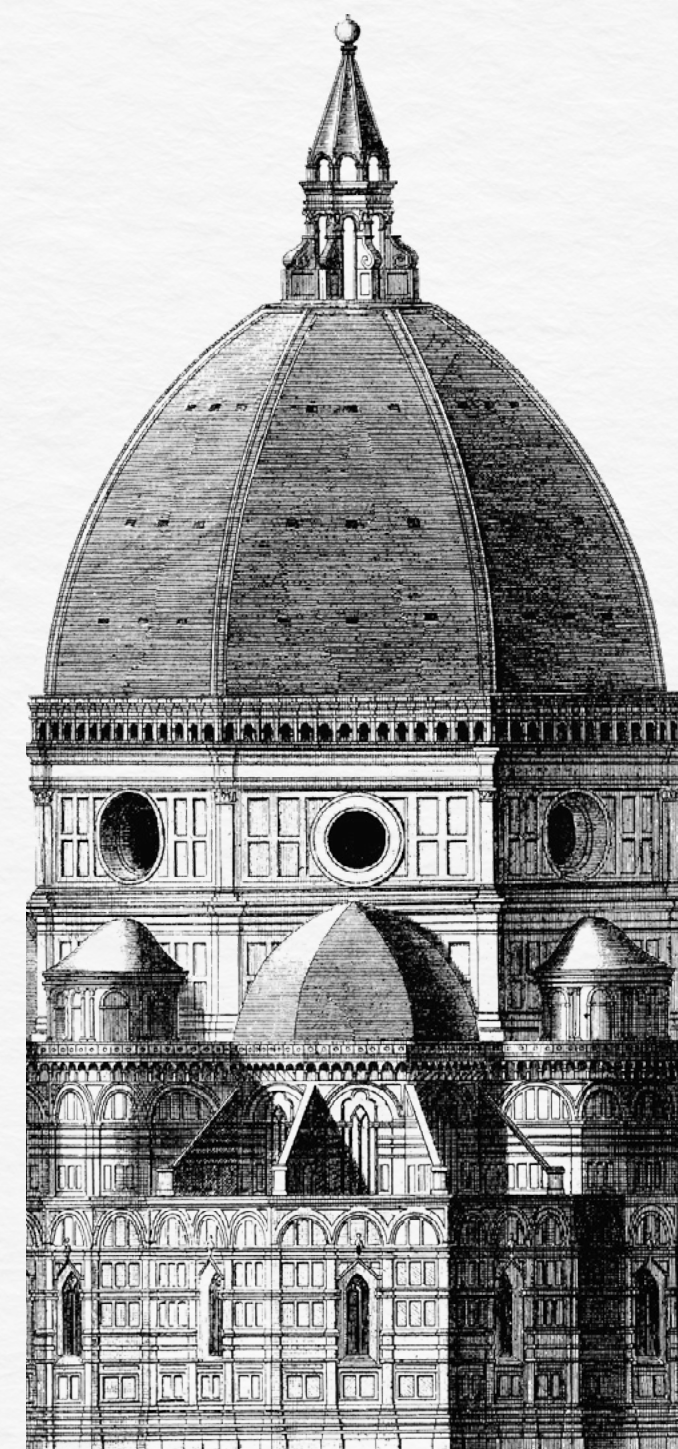


## PIERANNA NARDI

ITALY

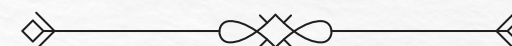


“I am a former teacher, eighty years old, with a working life spent in Florence. I am retired and I was digitally illiterate, therefore unable to overcome the generation gap that prevented me from communicating satisfactorily with my family members, both near and far. **Going back to school has reawakened my desire to rethink the world.**”



## GEA MULDER

NETHERLANDS



“From the age of 16, I took every job opportunity and enjoyed not having to learn. But after years of doing all kinds of jobs, I kept running into the same brick wall; **with no qualifications, I had no chance of getting ahead.** By the time I hit my early 30s, I’d had enough and sought help, so I decided to tackle my literacy problem and went back to school. There’s no shame in not being able to do something, but it’s a pity if you don’t try. Let me share these words: ‘I’ve never done it before, But I think I can do it.’”

## AFAF TOURKI

FRANCE



“For a long time, I led a very orderly professional life as a dedicated civil servant. **But when my children left home, it created an unexpected void that prompted me to take a long, hard look at myself.** I was at a crossroads, torn between the security of my status and the irresistible call of entrepreneurship.”

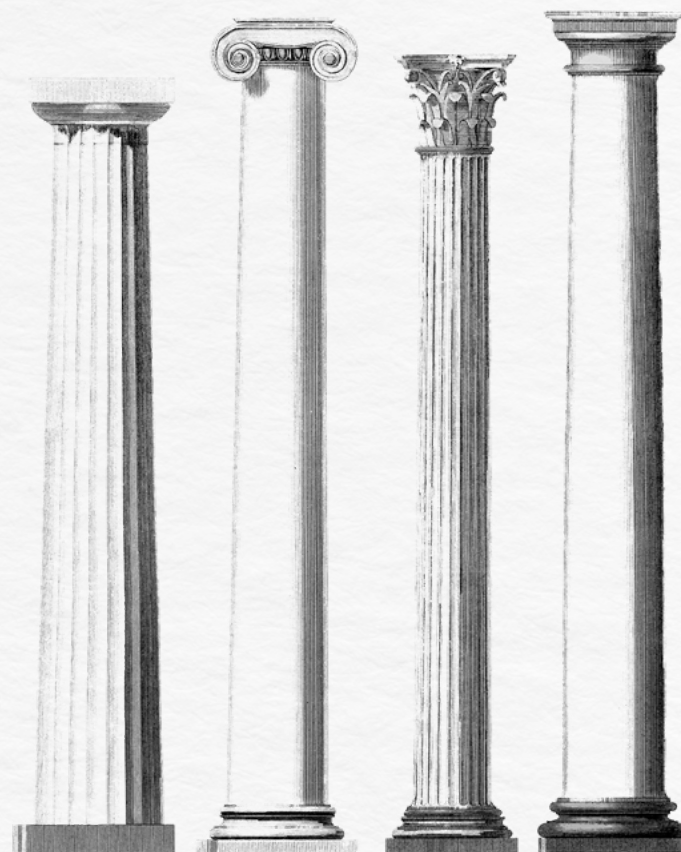


## FRANCESCO VERDEROSA

ITALY



"I began my career in Southern Italy as a professor of Italian with a specialisation in Medieval Latin Philology. I now work in adult education and am passionately committed to transformative learning opportunities. **My passion for education drives me to continue on this path, aware that every small step contributes to a better future.** Today I am where I want to be, always expanding opportunities to learn."

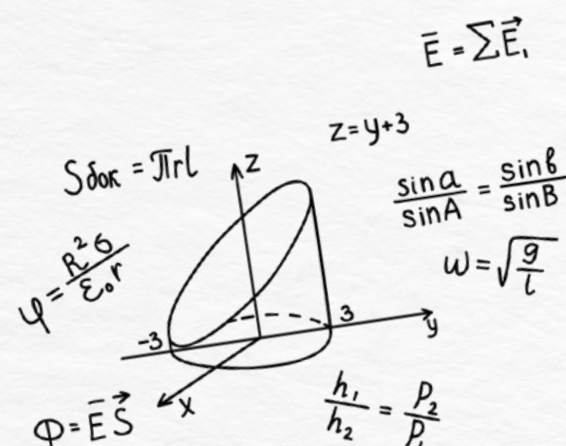


## ÉVA SZEDERKÉNYI

HUNGARY



"When I hear the gentle rhythm of Greek words, millennia echo. I am there with the 300 Greek heroes who fought to the death at Thermopylae. I hear the voices of brave men in the Peloponnese. Hellas. I see the long lines of Greeks fleeing from Turkey and hear the lullaby of mothers in pain and loss. Hellas. Full of love, courage, hard work and dignity. **Greece is a galaxy. And immortal.**"



1. Apple 2. Forsythia 3. Cherry 4. Lilac 5. Cornus mas 6. Pear

## KATEŘINA PÁVKOVÁ

CZECH REPUBLIC



"My story is proof that it is never too late to study. **Even at a mature age, individuals can completely change their qualifications.** They may pursue a field of study which they did not find interesting in their 20s or which they have gradually developed an appreciation for."

## MARIA MIFSUD

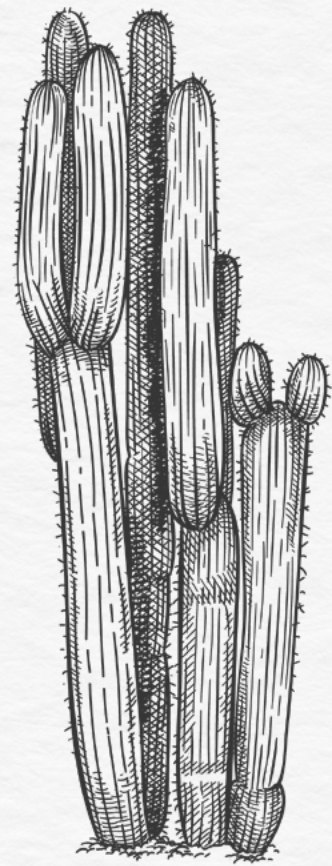
MALTA



"**In 2014, I lost my husband.** For 25 years, I was a full-time housewife as I had stopped working in accounts when I had my first child in 1988. I needed to get a job fast. Looking through vacancies, I soon realised I was as good as illiterate. In 25 years, the world has become computerised. I wasn't happy with just having basic qualifications..and that was the beginning of my teaching career. To all of you who are unhappy in your current situation, I have only this to say: **Study something you are passionate about! Believe in yourself! If I could do it, anyone can!**"







## CATERINA DE NARDI

ITALY

"I live and work in Southern Italy. This says a lot about geographical and social isolation. **My grandmother, Maria, used to say: 'One never stops learning.'** It is by this maxim that I've continued throughout my life to study and learn. I am at an age that some call serene. In a small way I'm succeeding."

## MANARA CHARIKLEIA

GREECE



"The world of learning has strengthened my personality and given me wings to pursue new goals in my career. In a short time, my life changed. Having a goal makes you happy. **When everything is racing around you, you need positive changes to feel like you are living in this time.** My future training goals include advancement in the digital environment, training integration forms of artificial intelligence applications, Generative AI integration, and basic instructional design principles integrated into University training programs. Becoming an educator was something I have wanted since I was a child. I hope education will be a very nice pastime for all adults and not stop all of them from setting goals."

## DINA SOEIRO

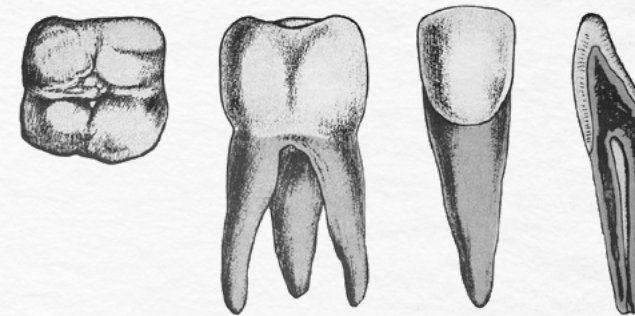
PORTUGAL

"I learn a lot from working with older adults who, having not been to school, know much about life. I know that educating older adults is an investment. It is an extraordinary opportunity to share the power of literacy, stories, and the people who tell them, and of truly transformative adult education!"



## JADRANKA PETRINEC

CROATIA



"As a professional teacher, I have discovered a passion for teaching and knowledge transfer that has added a new dimension to my professional and personal life. **Adult learning and education has changed my life in ways I could not have predicted.** Each student brings their own unique story and challenges, and working with them has allowed me to see how important the role of the teacher is in their professional development. Every interaction with them inspires me and encourages me to continue to improve and learn."

## LUIZA DE ALMEIDA OLIVEIR

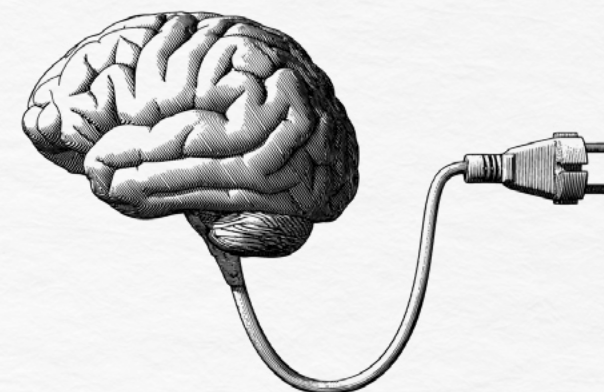
BELGIUM

"The international educational journey we undertook brought immense satisfaction as we witnessed the joy and discoveries of our students over these days. The experiences gained in the visited country are unforgettable, and our team works professionally together to achieve great results."



## HÜLYA CELİK

NETHERLANDS



"I always knew that you can do a lot with little, and I have seen that creative thinking can make those possibilities endless. I think the goal is important, to know what the destination is, but you learn during the process."



## LIDIA POKRZYCKA

POLAND



**“Teaching adults is an adventure, a motivator for constant development and modernisation of lectures, and looking for new solutions.** We have much to be proud of, and successes must be popularised and stand out. Upskilling and appreciation result in the professional empowerment of learners and, above all, in increased self-confidence and the acquisition of invaluable soft skills.”

## LUCIA IELPO

ITALY

“I love defining myself as an eternal beginner who wants to continually confront her limits and who experiments outside her comfort zone to learn to be and **give more as an Educator, a Woman, and an aware Citizen.** I am authentically in love with the discipline I teach, the English language, because language is a living thing, constantly evolving and presupposes encounters with others, dialogue, being together, being with.”



## CHRISTINA JOHNSTONE

SWEDEN



**“My life and work have changed in three ways:** First, I have become a lifelong learner myself because I cannot stop searching for better ways of empowering my learners and raising the learning and communication barriers. Next, I have become empowered by teaching because I have the opportunity to see how the theory is put into practice with real people from diverse backgrounds, sometimes also illiterate. Last, my work has made me even more creative than before! I cannot stop thinking of new activities and learning environment setups for my students to fully develop their learning capacities.”

## DAVID LOPEZ

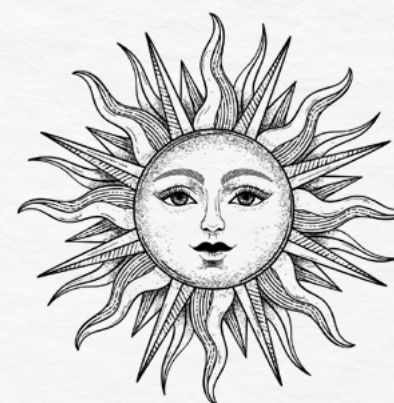
FRANCE

“There isn’t one event, one educational or training activity that I can identify as having contributed to my wellbeing or fulfilment. I think it’s more a long process, made up of encounters and moments when I’ve been able to reflect on the meaning of my education and training missions. **I’ve always been interested in educating others, convinced that to educate others is also to educate oneself.** But we have to get away from a vertical conception of education.”



## ANDRIJANA PAVICEVIC

MONTENEGRO



“Do you know that feeling when your body trembles and your eyes widen, eager to absorb as much beauty as possible? That’s what happened to me. **A moment that says, every day is a new opportunity to learn something new!** Let’s seize it and not wait for another day to pass! Because a day in which we haven’t learned something new is a lost day!”

## VILMA AUGLYTĖ

LITHUANIA



“At the adult school I met understanding and attentive people who had experienced many different learner stories and were genuinely trying to give them a happy ending. I was also fascinated by my classmates - never giving up, embracing life, striving for a goal. **Not everyone succeeded, but I was one of those who made it to the end.**”



AGNESE LEJNIECE

LATVIA

“Adult education can open up new opportunities, broaden horizons, change minds, reduce stereotypes, and encourage civic participation. Being active and learning throughout life is the key to success in increasing quality of life and competitiveness in the labor market. Every time I participate in adult education activities, I gain new knowledge, experience, and contacts that can be very useful in my future life because you never know when new contacts might come in handy.”



NINA PULKKINEN

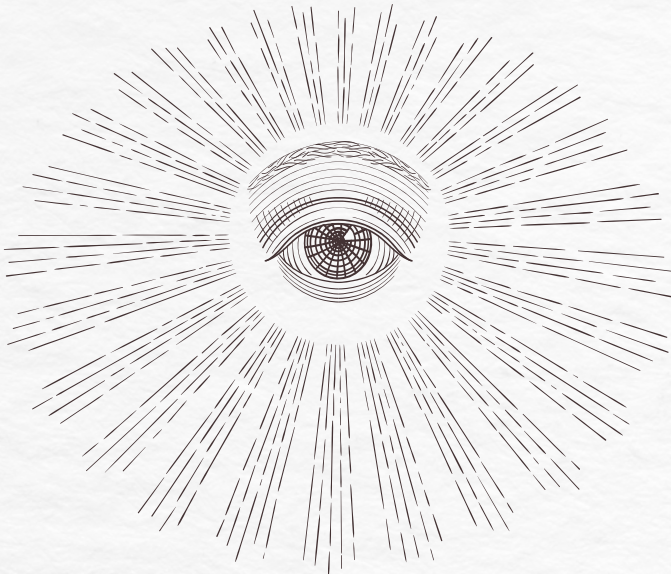
FINLAND

“As a child learning to read and write, people wanted to mould me into what they thought was needed, according to their values and their norms. **Only as an adult did I realise I could grow up to be a whole and complete person with my own values and standards.** I wanted to learn and study those things that would make me a more whole person. The kind of person I wanted to be. Adult education has taught me that I have the right to be who I am.”

MARGARETHA LINDH

SWEDEN

“Learning has always been a central part of my life, also as an adult. **Personally, I believe curiosity and creativity are the leading stars.** Added knowledge contributes to my well-being because there is always so much more to learn and know and new ways to find out how to use it. Knowledge gives self-awareness and, hopefully, wisdom. To learn new things makes me happy and keeps me vital.”



GREET DIERCKX

BELGIUM

“After years of teaching in education, I transitioned into a role that allowed me to pursue my passion for internationalisation. **In recent years, I have worked as an anchor for internationalisation, organising international learning opportunities for students and colleagues.** The added value and positive impact of these experiences are immense and cannot be emphasized enough.”

VIŠNJA MILEC

CROATIA



“**They say ‘Knowledge is power’ and they are right.** You are as powerful as you are sure of yourself, i.e. as much as you know. Education allows us to more easily adapt to various situations in both the labor market and everyday life, and to make better use of our knowledge. Knowledge is eternal and no one can take it from us. It affects self-confidence, personal growth and income. Adult education is a way of achieving your dreams and goals.”



## ARNELA SABANOVIC

## BOSNIA HERZEGOVINA

“As an active athlete, goalkeeper, and Bosnia and Herzegovina national team member, I had a strong passion for sports. **However, I also profoundly desired education, science, research, and the opportunity to make a difference as an educator.** I was faced with a significant decision: should I dedicate myself entirely to my sports career or pursue education and become a teacher? I realised that as an educator, I could make a long-term impact on my community because education is a lifelong commitment, unlike the limited timeframe of a sports career.”



## VERA MLINAR

## SLOVENIA

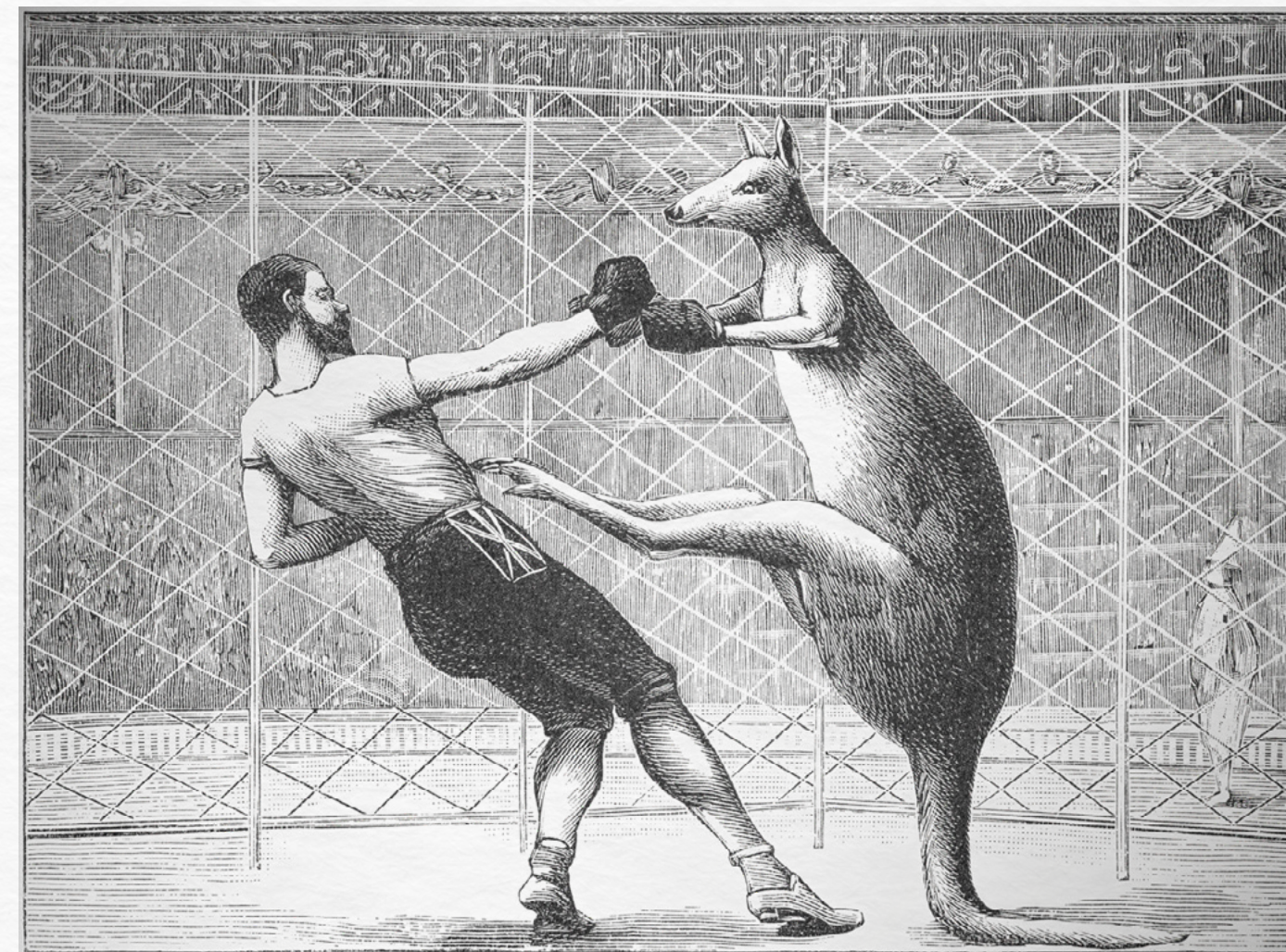
“As a child, my favourite way to play was to pretend to be someone else. When I was alone, I was a TV announcer, a shop assistant or a secretary. But I was most comfortable as a teacher. When the children from the neighbourhood gathered in the courtyard, I would sit them down on the steps. In front of a free-standing blackboard, chalk in hand, I would eagerly teach, and in between I would ask my friends questions, as a real teacher should. **Today I know that motivating adults to engage in processes is one of the most challenging tasks of an adult educator.**”



## EMMA SAISI

## ITALY

“As adults, we can approach studying with greater awareness and motivation, making the experience rewarding and stimulating. Whether we want to continue studying depends on us, how active we want to be, how much we want to keep up with the times and how alive our desire to be involved is. It is not the age that matters, but having someone to grow up with.”



## RITA PIERI

## ITALY

“**Attending school as an adult was a beneficial experience.** I acquired new knowledge gradually and now possess basic digital skills. What gives me the greatest satisfaction is learning to unleash my creativity for a better life. In the adult class group, I found the welcome and stimulation that I hope the many adults who want or would like to return to school find.”



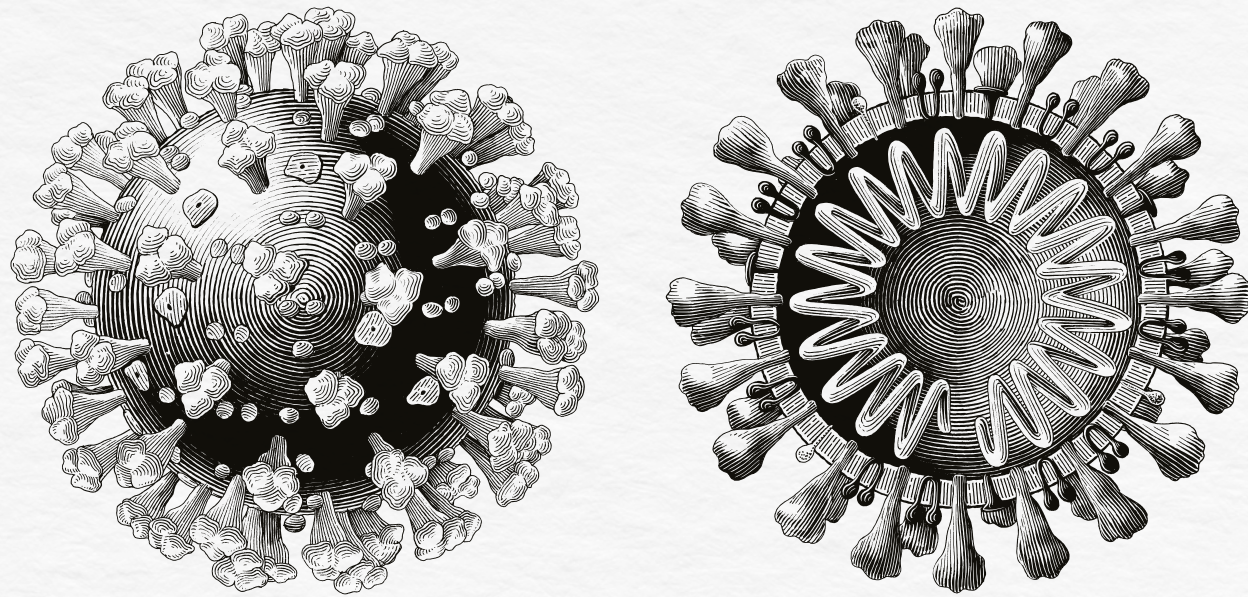


## MARIELLA TRAGGIAI

ITALY



"My experience was, I don't want to exaggerate, fantastic: from initial categorical refusal to total involvement! The first time I had to stop the face-to-face lessons (because of Covid), the possibility of continuing 'online' confirmed to me the potential of the technological medium I was getting to know. **Looking back now, the power of 'doing it together' as a group allowed me to still feel able to learn new things and try to understand what was going on around us.**"



## ANDREA KRCUNOVIĆ

CROATIA



"**Working with adult learners often brings a wealth of different experiences and perspectives, which makes teaching dynamic and challenging.** Such teaching inspires me as a competent teacher because I constantly need to improve and learn new concepts to remain relevant and effective in my teaching. I am still an eternal learner who, along with the desire for knowledge, wants to selflessly pass on my knowledge and thus pass on love and passion for work."

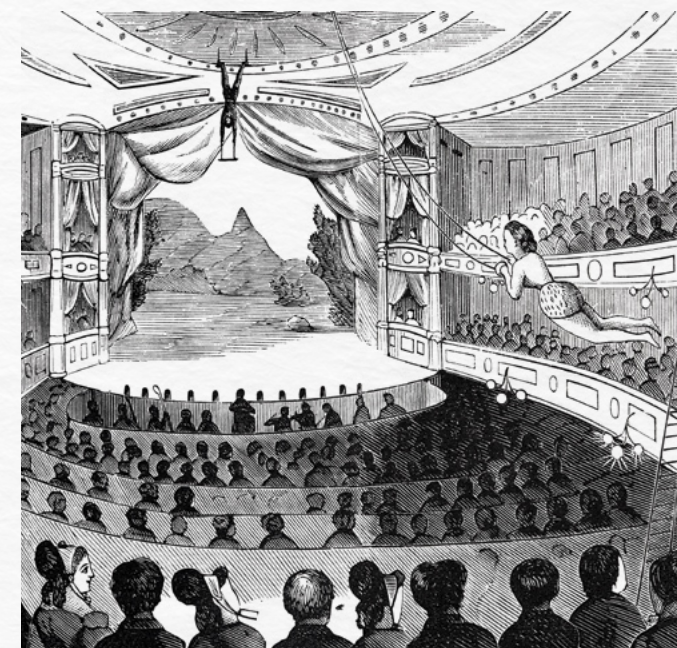


## OLA CHODASZ

POLAND



"**I came straight from the Polish education system and then started learning through experience.** I went from writing down what professors said to being immersed in workshops and training sessions. I was always moving, working with space and body, laughing and crying, talking and discussing our shared experiences. "This is it!" I thought. "This is how I should have learned, and how I want to work!"



## ANNALEDA MAZZUCATO

ITALY



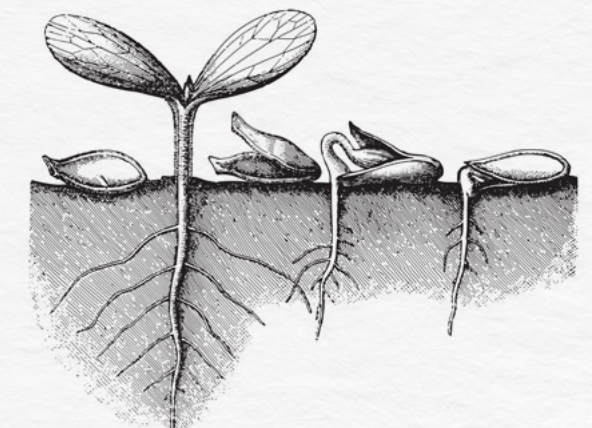
"My journey through learning and education has been one of continuous growth, discovery, and empowerment. This commitment has enriched my life and positively impacted my interactions with others, both personally and professionally. **The transformative power of adult learning lies in more than just acquiring new skills; it profoundly changes lives.** For me, education has been a lifelong journey, continuously reshaping my perspective and capabilities. Learning new skills has made me more adaptable and resilient in the face of change."

## JOANA PINA

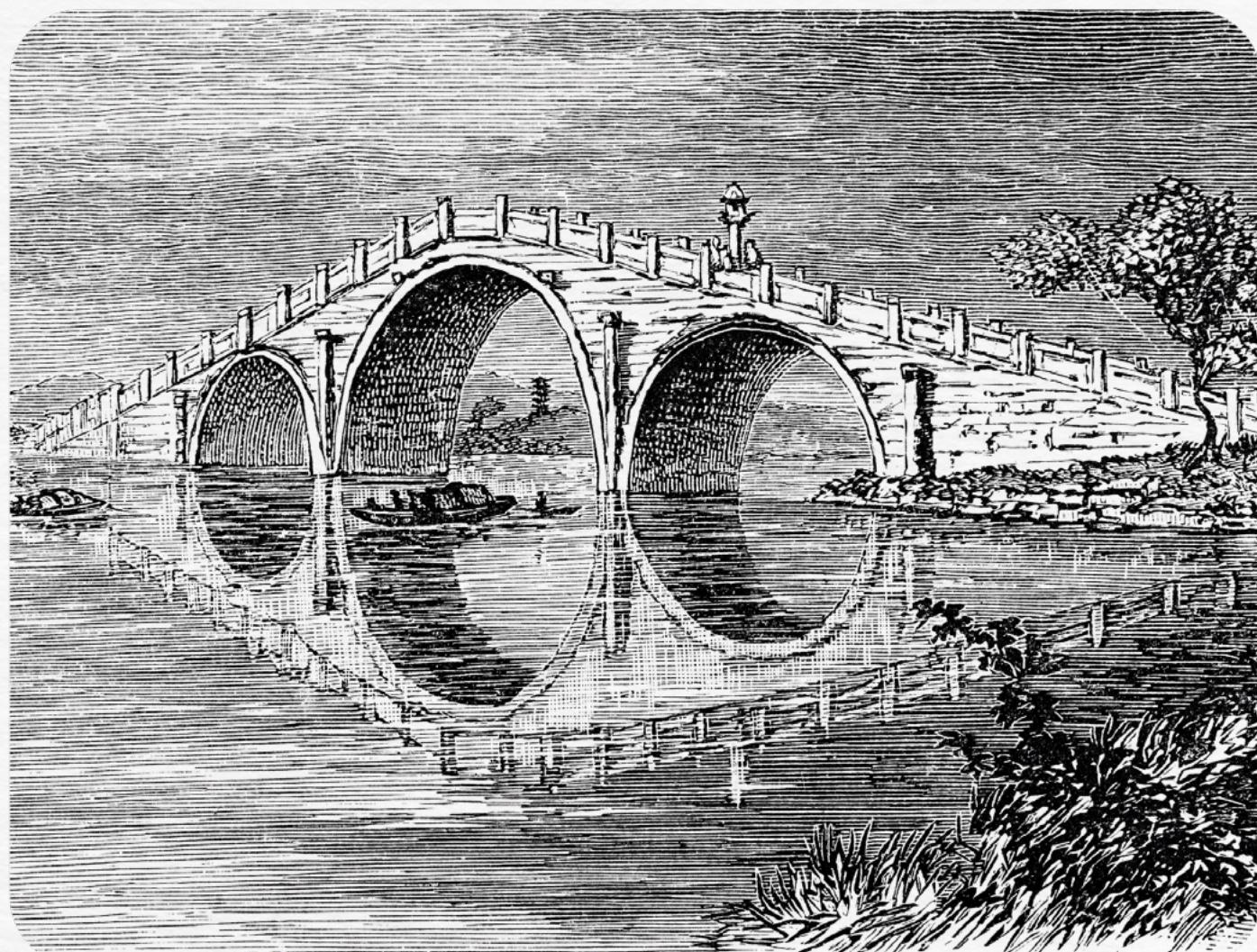
PORTUGAL



"**Working in adult education faces many daily challenges, from the constant changes in our team to relying on a financial and pedagogic application.** Also, having to deal with different audiences can be challenging. Regardless of the struggles that come with every job, the positives definitely outweigh the negatives. This line of work keeps us humble, aware of our surroundings, and always trying to improve as professionals and human beings."







## CHAPTER II.

# BREAKING BARRIERS AND BUILDING BRIDGES



Sometimes, the tallest walls are invisible. They rise between languages and cultures, between abilities and opportunities, between what is and what could be. These are the stories of educators who saw these walls not as barriers, but as challenges to overcome – one lesson, one connection, one breakthrough at a time. In prison classrooms and community centers, in programs for parents of deaf children and workshops for older adults venturing into the digital world, these educators have become bridge-builders. **Their stories take us into spaces where learning becomes a powerful tool for inclusion, where differences are celebrated as strengths, and where isolation gives way to connection.** Meet those who guide migrant people in finding their voice in a new language, those who help neurodivergent learners discover their unique potential, and those who transform physical limitations into possibilities for growth. These narratives remind us that education at its best is not just about transferring knowledge – it's about creating spaces where everyone belongs, where every story matters, and where learning becomes a journey we take together. As you read these accounts, you'll discover how adult education becomes a universal language of hope, understanding, and possibility. These are stories of barriers transformed into bridges, of isolation turned into community, and of differences becoming the very foundation of our shared human experience.

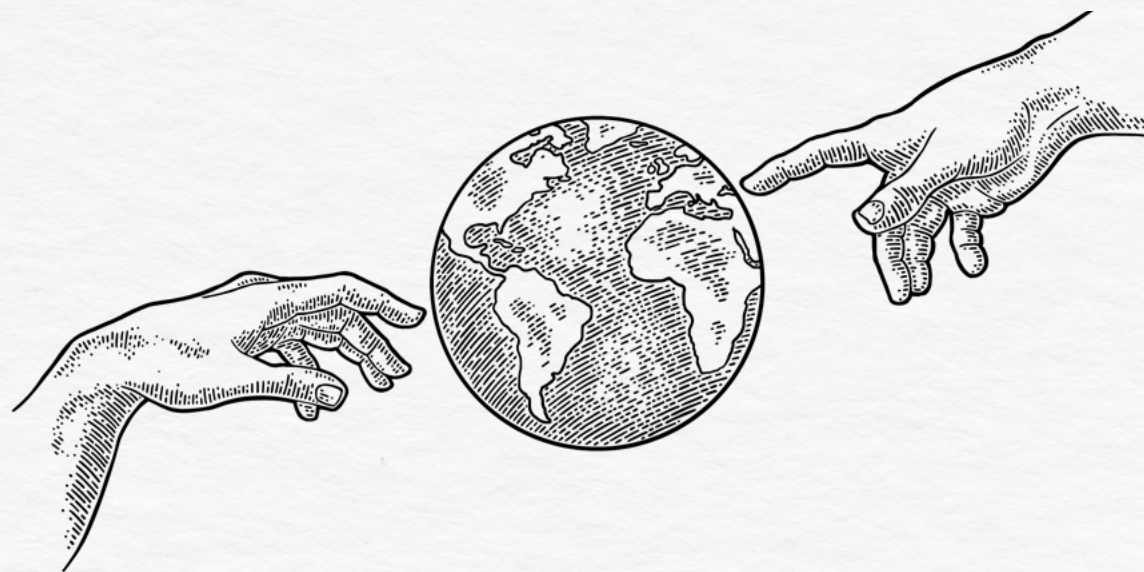


## GREET DIERCKX

BELGIUM



“Building social networks and providing a sense of community and support is invaluable for people who often deal with social isolation due to their condition. By teaching to appreciate differences and think more inclusively, we can contribute to personal growth while promoting a more inclusive society. **People learn to cope with their own limitations but also to transcend them and participate in a broader social and societal context.** Education can be a powerful tool not only to support individuals through education and social activities, but also to contribute to a fairer and more inclusive society. Education can do more than just share knowledge; it can also improve lives and strengthen communities.”



## ANNE-CHARLOTTE ORIOL

FRANCE



“Rouh’s path to integration in France is the same as that of many migrants. It is a journey made up of isolation and institutional abuse, but also of wonderful encounters, the solidarity of men and women involved in associations, and a great deal of determination, curiosity and courage. He has chosen to volunteer, and it is not just because he wants to give something back. **When you have always loved to repair anything you can get your hands on, when you are passionate... you don’t just give back, you bring a wealth of valuable skills and qualities.**”

## MADLINE ARBID

SWEDEN



“Some people tend to be socially excluded if they do not dedicate sufficient time to learning and speaking a language fluently. **I became a teacher, often described as passionate by others.** However, I simply see it as doing what feels right in my heart.”



## BORJANA KOZELJ

SLOVENIA



“**We also have a responsibility towards the oldest learners,** who do not use computers and often find it difficult to access some basic services. I made personal progress by implementing many ideas for which I gained knowledge and experience.”

## KATJA LENIČ ŠALAMUN

AUSTRIA



“Becoming a parent is a transformative experience, filled with expectations, joy and a host of challenges. For parents of deaf children, this journey is particularly complicated as they have to deal not only with the usual tasks of parenthood, but also with additional communication barriers, medical considerations and emotional issues. I developed a programme in response to these challenges and aims to empower parents around the world by providing them with support and resources. **It was a deeply personal experience that grew out of my own situation as a parent of a deaf child.**”



## FLORIAN VALLET

FRANCE

“Sharing, passing on knowledge, explaining my story... This is the best achievement! In my personal life, my wife is in a wheelchair, we created our company together to develop accessible outdoor activities and tourism. It’s a passionate experience. **We have tried to present our history, our activity... Sharing our experience of disability is my reason for teaching, for educating!**”



## GISELA WINKLER

GERMANY



“I have been working with people with fewer opportunities for more than 40 years and **I am passionate about inspiring people with disabilities to engage in lifelong learning.** This year, for the first time, I used the opportunities offered by Erasmus+ to organise a learning trip for employees of the Caritas workshop for disabled people.”

## NICK MALLIOS

GREECE



“**Almost seven years ago, I made a life-changing career decision,** a decision to test my skills as an educator in a Second Chance School for adult men, located inside a prison. Since then, my professional life has taken a completely different direction, and my involvement in Erasmus+ projects within the school has enabled me to follow the ‘magical’ world of the Erasmus+ and EPALE communities. Erasmus+ projects gave our students the opportunity to express themselves artistically, to acquire new skills, to increase their self-confidence and self-esteem and, above all, to become part of a team - a task that requires attention and discipline.”

## ANNA RESSA

ITALY



“Usually, it is considered that migrants are any people who leave their countries because they find themselves in need to do so because they want a better job, they are in danger and fear for their lives, or simply they are just looking to improve their living standards. **Nevertheless, migrants are also people who face language or accent barriers, suffer from the complexity of the bureaucracy, and have problems getting finance and support.** Integrating workers and entrepreneurs from other countries has been a major challenge for Italy for several years. It is crucial to provide these individuals with the tools and information they need to integrate successfully and productively into the local social and economic fabric, allowing them to participate in and benefit from the development of the territory.”

## DOMINIK RUDZKI

POLAND



“**I found out very late that I was on the autism spectrum.** It explained a lot of things that I didn’t fully understand. The diagnosis was a great relief. Many people underestimate what neurodiverse people can bring to their daily work, to the implementation of projects, especially artistic and educational ones. At first, I thought maybe I lacked the psychological background to be a self-advocate. But then I realised that you can learn through experience. And who has more experience in educating neurodiverse people than a neurodiverse person?”

## ÁNGEL LÓPEZ FERNÁNDEZ

SPAIN

“The importance of these safe and friendly environments cannot be underestimated. They are the foundation upon which trust and effective learning relationships are built. **By feeling part of a supportive community, young adults can face their challenges with greater resilience and hope.** This supportive environment gives them the emotional stability they need to dream and plan for their future, knowing that they are not alone in their journey.”







**GORDANA GJORGIEVSKA-  
NEDELKOVSKI**  
NORTH MACEDONIA

“Lifelong learning presents an opportunity for the expansion of one’s horizons, offering the prospect of hitherto unattainable possibilities. **Furthermore, as a learner, one has the opportunity to transfer existing knowledge and to be introduced to new knowledge and skills.** One must never allow oneself to be discouraged. It is important to nurture one’s inner child, to cultivate a sense of curiosity about the world and its possibilities, to maintain connections with those who are working and making friends.”

## BORJANA KOZELJ

SLOVENIA

“Some people tend to be socially excluded if they do not dedicate sufficient time to learning and speaking a language fluently. **I became a teacher, often described as passionate by others.** However, I simply see it as doing what feels right in my heart.”



## VIRGINIJA SVEDIENE

LITHUANIA



“**Adult learners are formed personalities, so communication with them is a great advantage for the educator.** People come with their own life and professional experience, with expectations and motivation; all they need is agreement on how to achieve improvement together.”

## RENATO LUTI

ITALY



“Technological changes in recent decades have modified the needs of our society. **The way we participate in the society we live in has significantly changed.** The aging population in developed countries is transforming the training needs of the adult population, especially the older ones. The solution is introducing and spreading new learning perspectives to people over 50.”

## JUSTYNA PATER

POLAND



“Some people start volunteering because they want to help others; they want to feel needed. **There are those for whom a sense of community and interaction with people sharing similar views and values are important.** Others want to develop their interests and passions. There are many reasons to get involved in voluntary activities. And they are all good.”

## VALERIJA DODIG AND ANA KORDIĆ

BOSNIA HERZEGOVINA



“The first best thing that could have happened to us professionally was to leave the classroom. The next best thing is going back to the classroom. **Returning to the classroom meant an even greater empowerment to work with the students and a great desire to share their experiences.** We like to say that we go from one extreme to the other.”





CAROLINE LIMOUSIN

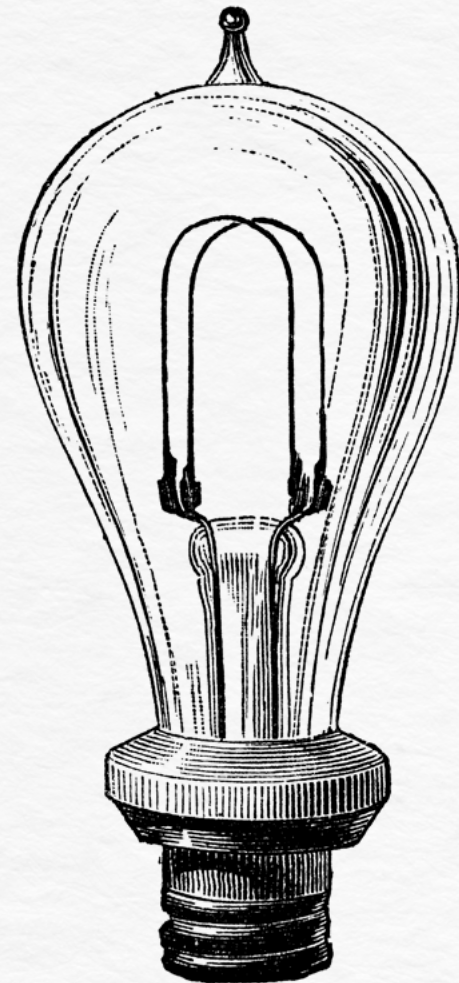
FRANCE

“I am discovering new human beings, meeting incredible people, often people who have significant scars from their time at school. Sometimes you have to win them over, understand that adult training is something different, that it is based on experiences, that it has meaning. Adult training helps to empower individuals by opening up the field of possibilities.”

CHARLOTTE MAYENBURG

NETHERLANDS

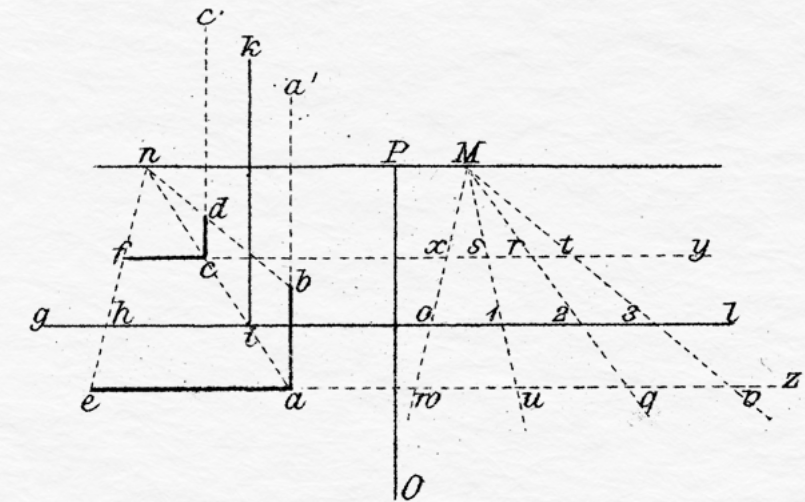
“Every day when I go to work, I see how learning a language opens up your world. Even though it’s a long, intensive, and sometimes frustrating process, I also see ‘eureka moments’ in my classes every week. Well, **I still agree with the quote ‘The limits of my language are the limits of my world’ (Ludwig Wittgenstein) - for the most part.** Now I can add: What if you’re unable to master a new language because of a learning disability or reading difficulties? Does that mean your world is too limited?”



JOLANTA ČEPONAITĖ

LITHUANIA

“**Education can change your life - that’s how I greeted my new students.** And when they left school, I told them all - don’t put your certificate in the cupboard, you have to get a job - go on with your education. And as a maths teacher, I always added - if you want to do it and if you put in the effort, you can make friends with maths. I never said it would be easy, but it can be done.”



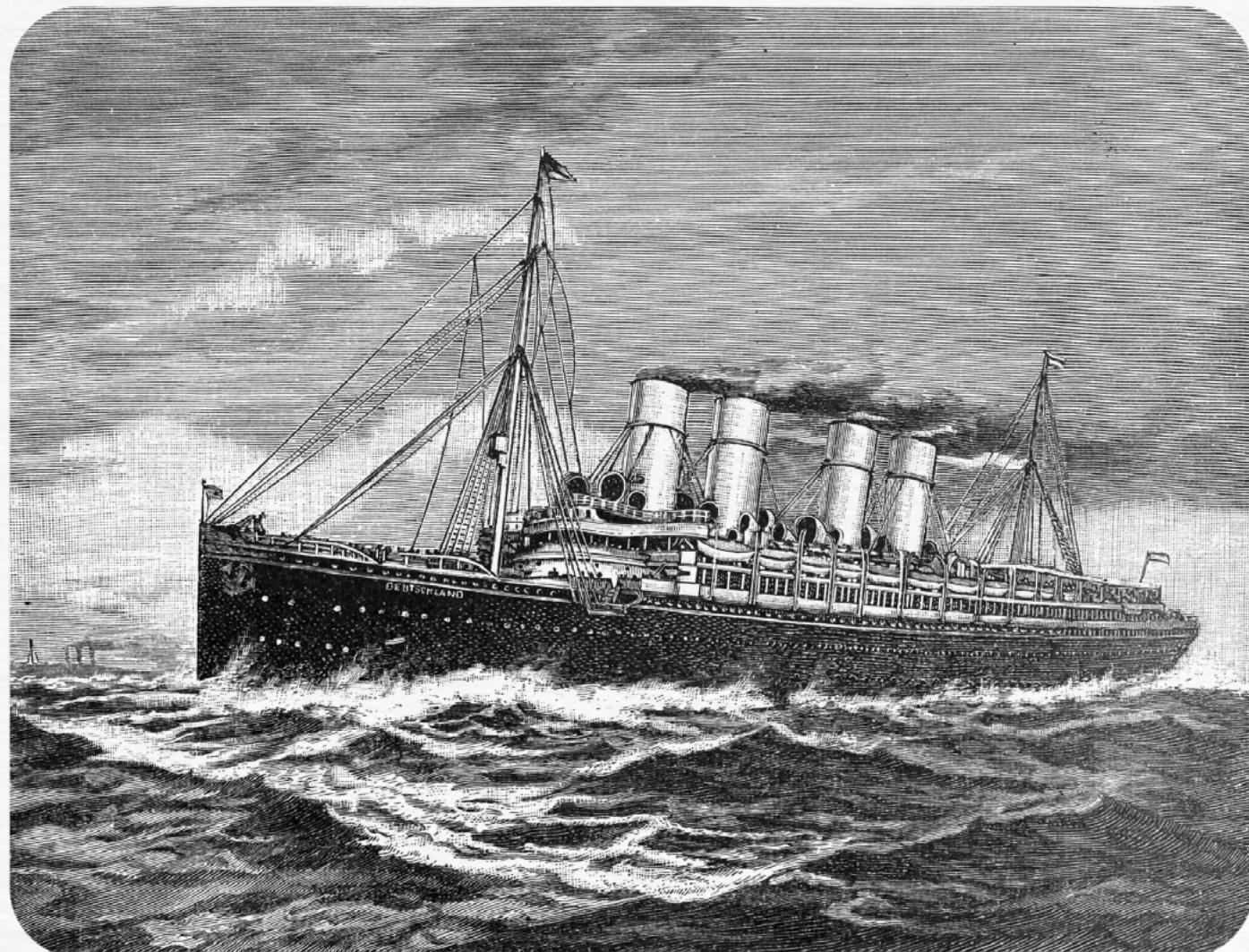
MATTIA BADANO

ITALY

“One of the most rewarding aspects of my work is seeing how education can break down barriers. Many adults come into our programs with insecurity and self-doubt. **Learners acquire new skills and develop a renewed sense of purpose and self-worth.** This is the true power of adult education - transforming lives, one learner at a time.”







### CHAPTER III.

## THE RIPPLE EFFECT: FROM PERSONAL GROWTH TO SOCIAL IMPACT



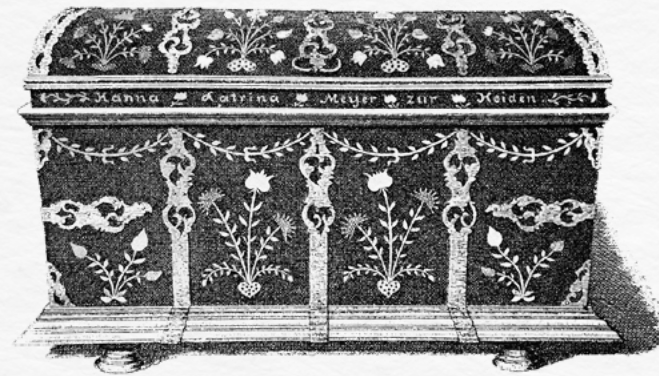
Every act of learning creates ripples that reach far beyond the initial splash. What begins as one person's quest for knowledge transforms into a force that touches families, strengthens communities, and shapes societies. These are the stories of those ripples - of personal transformations that grew into movements for change. Meet educators whose own learning journeys inspired them to create innovative community projects, whose personal struggles became blueprints for empowering others, and whose individual growth blossomed into collective action. From sustainable community initiatives to programs for marginalized groups, their stories reveal how education becomes a catalyst for social transformation. In these narratives, we witness how knowledge shared multiplies, how skills learned become tools for change, and how personal victories evolve into community triumphs. Here are the maker-designers working with eager beginners, the mentors creating pathways for future leaders, and the visionaries turning personal insights into social innovations. As you explore these stories, you'll see how the journey of education extends far beyond individual achievement. **These stories remind us that every person who learns becomes a potential teacher, every skill mastered becomes a gift to share, and every personal breakthrough can light the way for others to follow.** They show us that in adult education, the end of one learning journey is often just the beginning of something much bigger - a ripple effect that continues to spread, touching lives in ways we might never have imagined.



## JEANETTE HAMMER

AUSTRIA

**"I love making people aware and sensitive to the fact that they still have many strengths and skills waiting to be discovered.** Most people are only aware of formally acquired competences. However, through learning by doing, both at work and at home, as well as through volunteering and hobbies, we acquire so many more skills throughout our lives. It is my duty to point this out to the people who come to us and to go on a kind of treasure hunt with them."



## PASCHALIA LEVENTI

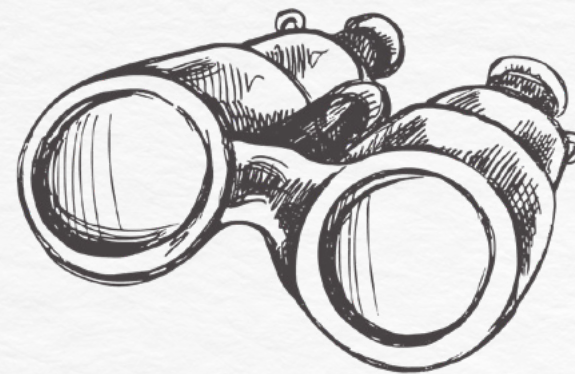
CYPRUS

"By empowering professionals and learners to shape their own learning experiences, you give them a sense of ownership and responsibility. This empowerment extends beyond individual growth, as collective contributions lead to the creation of accessible and high-quality educational resources for all. **Through active participation and collaboration, individuals not only acquire new skills but also gain the confidence to pursue their aspirations.** As empowered learners continue to engage with adult education, they become agents of social change, fostering a more equitable and inclusive society."



## ANITA POSAVEC

CROATIA



"I realised that by working on my 'inner' self, by understanding my emotions, values and needs, I automatically improve my ideas and my business. I now look at every situation in life more positively, I react more quickly and I am not afraid to accept new challenges and opportunities with open arms. **To me, being able to act independently is the ultimate definition of intellectual and spiritual freedom.** Every new piece of knowledge, every adult education, has a huge impact on the development of society because it strengthens the individual intellectually and spiritually, and it is those strong individuals who want to change things for the better and strive for a more inclusive and equal society."

## ŠEJLA DŽANAN

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

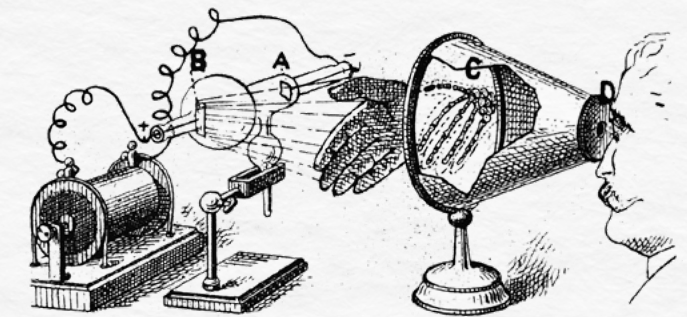


"Since childhood, I have known that I will be a teacher, someone who learns constantly and teaches others. This feeling has followed me through all my life. **My mission is to shape important figures that exist in my community that I believe are important at a certain point in life.** I want to influence others to do good things and experience their actions' results afterwards. A considerable number of my students have actively participated in local community NGOs and engaged in peer-learning programs as educators. These activities have enabled them to develop their skills and competencies, leading to positive personal growth and improving their school environment. This was a chance for them to learn to love education and chose it as their life path."

ed'u-ca'tion n.  
the process of educating;  
teaching

## FOTEINI SOKRATOUS

CYPRUS



"Working on projects that can have an impact on the community has contributed to my own sense of achievement and ability to change people's attitudes and why not change society. However, **the journey of adult education as a researcher is multi-dimensional** and can be fulfilled by creating pathways for young people, migrants, women, LGBTQ+ people, youth workers etc. to develop their skills and be heard through our channels."

PASCALE EN ANNEKE  
VANCROMBRUGGEN - VERBRUGGEN

CYPRUS

"Our mission in adult education is to continue sharing and **promoting this transformative power of education** so that more people have the opportunity to grow and thrive."





HE ZHIRU

FRANCE / CHINA

“Through diverse projects, including my studies, coordination and participation in Erasmus+ initiatives I’ve discovered empowerment through connection and the transformative power of everyday interactions. **By sharing experiences and stories, I’ve realized the importance of facilitating connections among individuals from diverse backgrounds, contributing to a more inclusive society.**”



SOLANGE SILVA

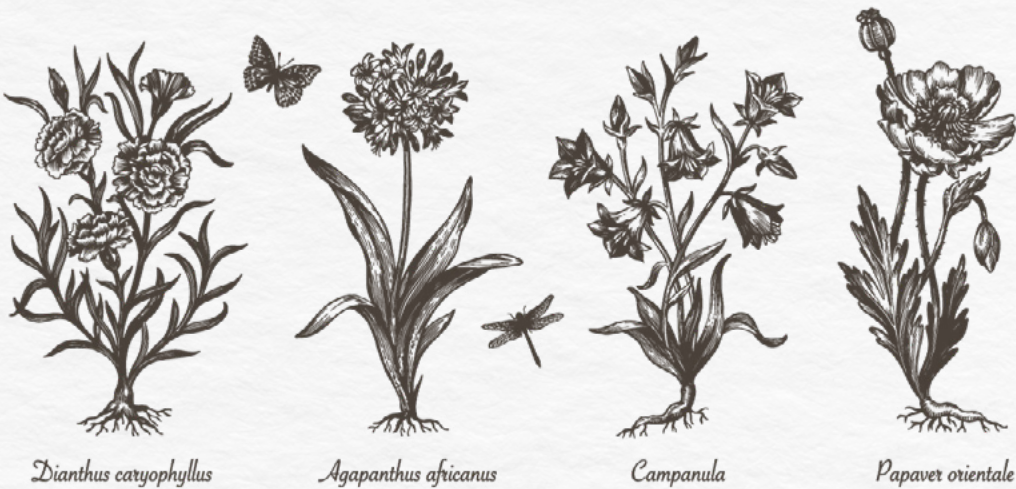
PORTUGAL



“I’ve always believed in the power of education and sharing knowledge, **but I now realise that the real impact of my work is not just to pass on technical knowledge, but to inspire confidence and inspiration.** Today, I continue to train and mentor new professionals, with more passion. I believe that each person I help to grow takes with them a piece of my dedication, commitment and passion.”

SAŠA KLIKOVAC

MONTENEGRO

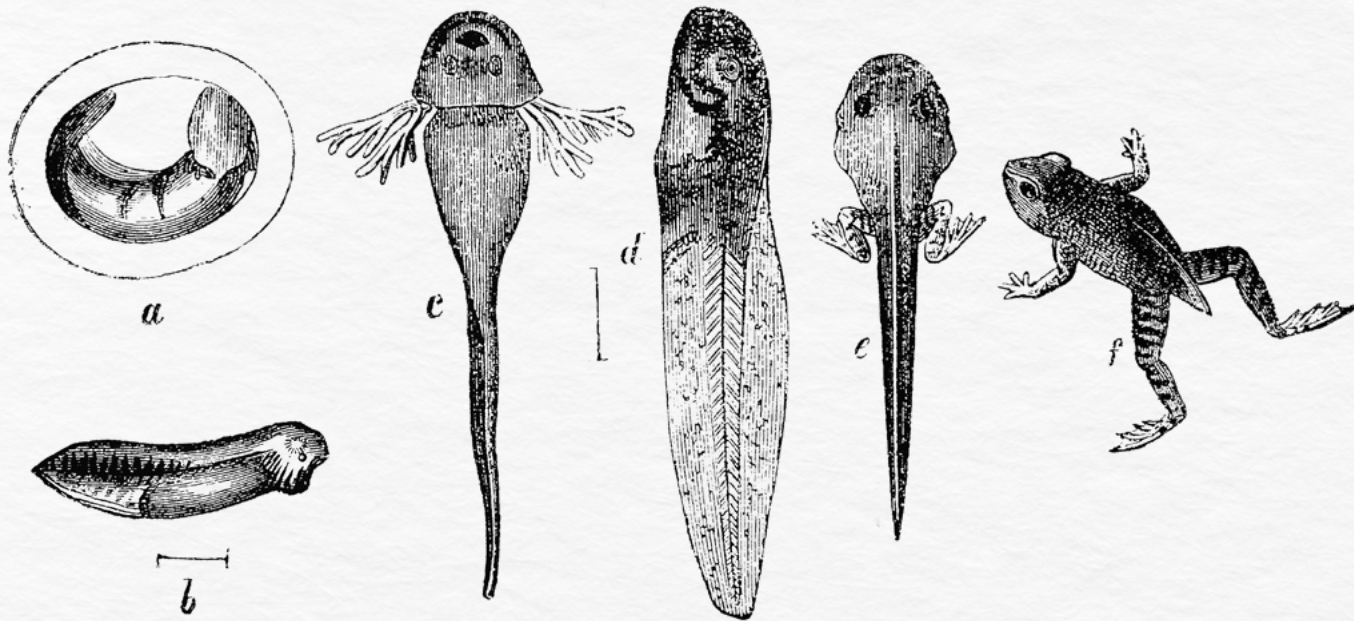


“**Nature has already given us clear warnings; it is up to us to understand them correctly and respond appropriately.** If we want to understand all this and act to preserve life on Earth, we must be ready to learn and selflessly share the knowledge we possess. No system teaches us this better than the system of adult education and learning.”

TAINA LAAKSONEN

FINLAND

“When maker-designers, experienced professionals and eager beginners come together to learn and share skills, they not only build a stronger community, but also a more sustainable future. This is my commitment - **a story of how adult learning can transform lives, making them more meaningful and sustainable, culturally, environmentally and socially.**”



GORDANA BOSKOVIC

MONTENEGRO

“Adult education is my profession and has significantly shaped my life path and lifestyle. **By teaching others, I have developed a habit of continuously working on my own education and improvement, exploring new topics, acquiring new knowledge, and gaining new experiences.** Adult education has allowed me to understand various professions’ essences and challenges. No system is as powerful in empowering individuals and society as a whole as adult education.”



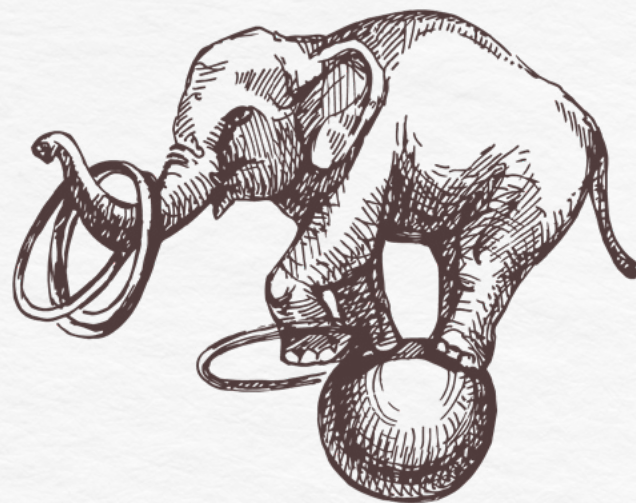


## TOMASZ SZTREKIER

POLAND



“There is one thing that I definitely learned. **The regularity and consistency matter the most in terms of adult learning - at least in terms of foreign language learning.** When learners get the right pace/rhythm of their study, the effects are bound to come sooner or later. Adult life brings so many things to tackle that, unsurprisingly, all we can do is prioritise. As educators, we must be aware that our adult learners/trainees are likely to give in at any time. If they are not driven by something non-negotiable, they may concentrate on work, family, health, or relaxation for some very sound reasons. Our mission is to motivate them to try to combine everything they have on their plates and come to terms with the fact that sometimes too much is just too much.”

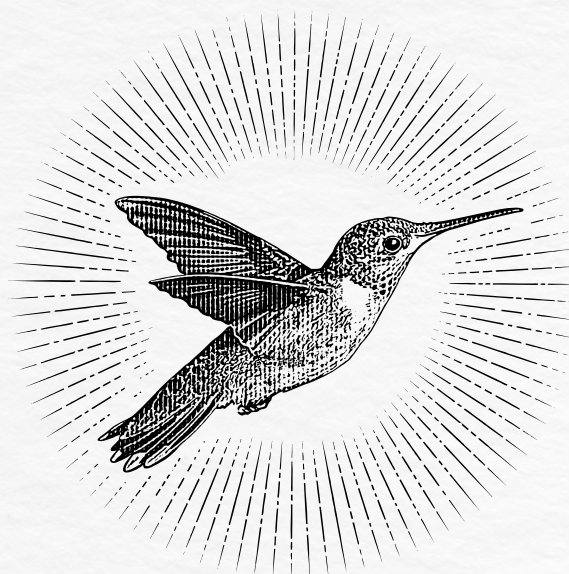


## OKSANA SOROČINA

LATVIA



“**Each education and training I received built my personal learning path.** However, I have built this path knowing that I need to develop my skills in parallel with the changes taking place in the community.”



## OLEKSII ZAHREBELNYI

UKRAINE



“**Training inmates to become peer-to-peer social workers helps ex-convicts reintegrate into society.** While still in prison, inmates can learn how to provide social services to combat disease and find employment.”

## PETRA KUPSJAK VARMUŽA

CROATIA



“When I teach adults, their valuable insights enrich our discussions and signify the essence of lifelong learning. **My praise for their progress not only boosts their confidence but also reinforces the idea that every step of the learning path, no matter how small, is crucial in maintaining their enthusiasm and motivation.** Undeniably, a climate of heartfelt openness and mutual respect creates a nurturing environment where learning could flourish, confirming my belief that education is not just about imparting knowledge but building connections and fostering relationships.”

## DANIELA PIERONI

ITALY



“**Training inmates to become peer-to-peer social workers helps ex-convicts reintegrate into society.** While still in prison, inmates can learn how to provide social services to combat disease and find employment. One day, a long time ago, a little drop came out of the earth and began its journey in a little stream: I was dancing happily, enjoying my surroundings, enjoying the sunshine that warmed me, breathing clean air! I knew that I could be the architect of my own destiny, everything was beautiful! Soon I entered a river, an impetuous river, sometimes uncontrollable, full of pitfalls and dangers, but always stimulating, I ended up in whirling bends, but then, I don't know if by chance or luck, I resumed my path. Today I have arrived at a great river that flows calmly. Here I am in a big lake, where I have the opportunity to get to know and be known by so many other drops (EPALE).”





JOÃO PINTO

PORTUGAL

“The hashtag **#EverythingWillBeAlright** arrived as quickly as **COVID-19** itself. Social networks were buzzing with their use, and everyone’s lockdown was the new social challenge to share. The reality was that **#ItWasNotAlright** with many of us. This is the bipolar reality of social networks. The good and the bad cohabit side by side, involving ordinary users, competing for likes and views... and unlike the stories of our childhood, the best doesn’t always win.”

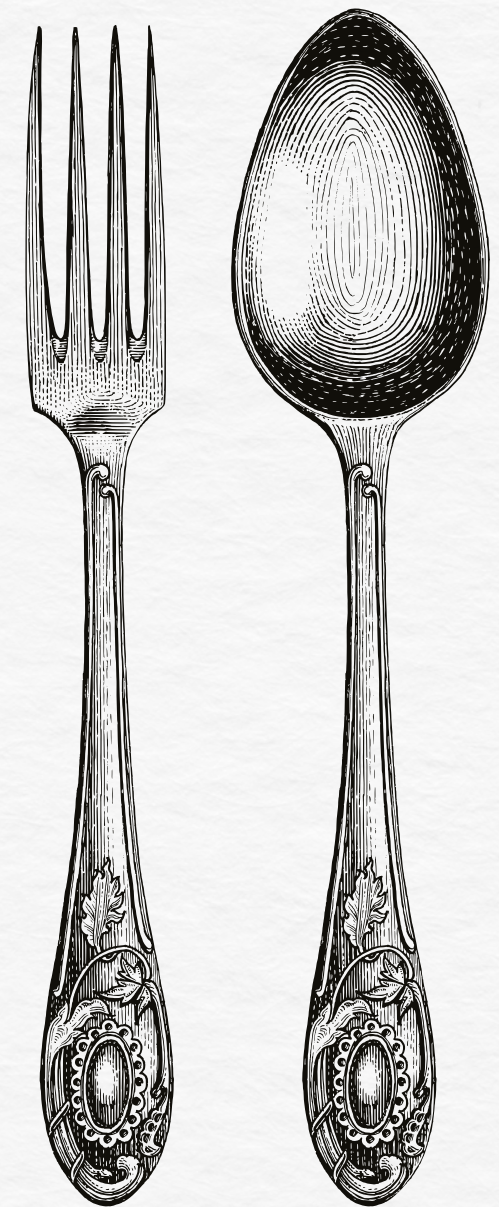
CHARA KOURLESSI

GREECE

“When I teach adults, their valuable insights enrich our discussions and signify the essence of lifelong learning. My praise for their progress not only boosts their confidence but also reinforces the idea that every step of the learning path, no matter how small, is crucial in maintaining their enthusiasm and motivation. Undeniably, a climate of heartfelt openness and mutual respect creates a nurturing environment where learning could flourish, confirming my belief that education is not just about imparting knowledge but building connections and fostering relationships.”



Gebräuchliches Seifenkraut  
(Saponaria officinalis).



INGRID SCHREYERS

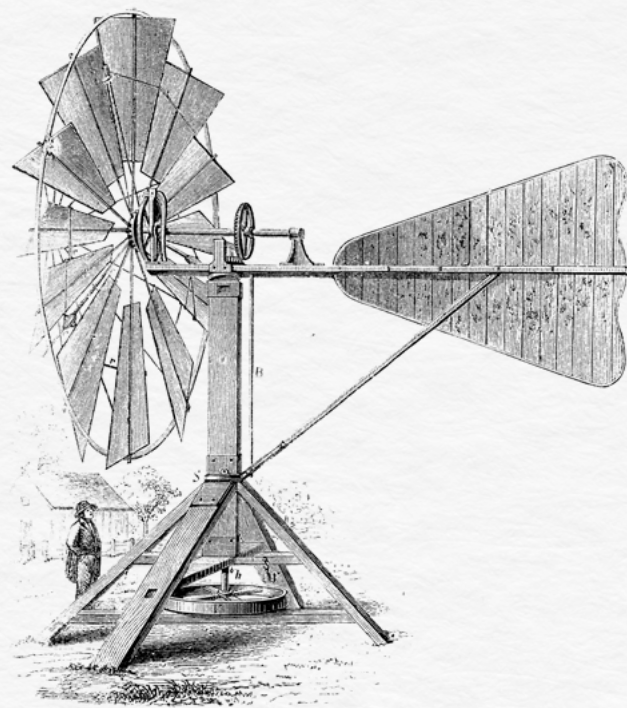
BELGIUM

“My professional life is a patchwork of humanitarian work focused on health, creativity and growth. I have travelled the world. In Guatemala, I was fascinated by weaving because of its magical connection to midwifery. Partly from a family history, the passion for textile creations grew there. I am now 65 years old and two years ago I started the project Our Dinner Party on a voluntary basis. This project gives women a voice through narrative textiles.”



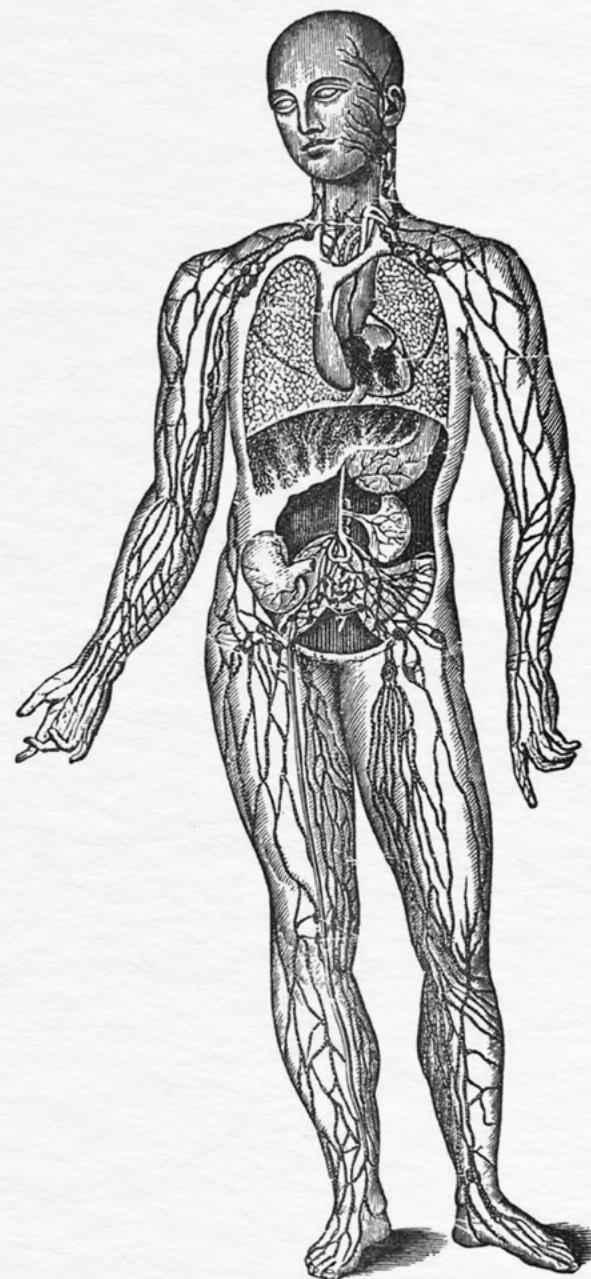
SONJA KARBON

AUSTRIA



**“Education has a central role to play. Working with competences requires not only a focus on the learner, but also a look to the future in order to know which competences need to be developed more intensively in the present.**

It is therefore very important for me to create a synergy between the present and the future in the different educational programmes, because regardless of the target group, every single person in the learning context is also an “agent of change” for a sustainable future.”



GORAN STOKIĆ

CROATIA

**“In my lectures, I often say: “Knowledge is multiplied by sharing” and “Lives are saved by actions, not academic titles.”** As a specialist in emergency medicine I try hard to pass on my knowledge to my learners because this knowledge may one day save someone’s life. My motto is: “Transmit your knowledge to the learners because maybe tomorrow you will be the one whose life depends on their knowledge.”

ANNIK DIERCKX

BELGIUM

**“Adult education can help adults by providing them with the tools and knowledge they need to achieve their goals.** It offers opportunities for personal growth, professional development, and a better standard of living. By sharing my experiences and contributing to educational programs, I hope to have a positive impact on the lives of others, just as adult education has had on mine.”



DIMITRIOS ZERVAS

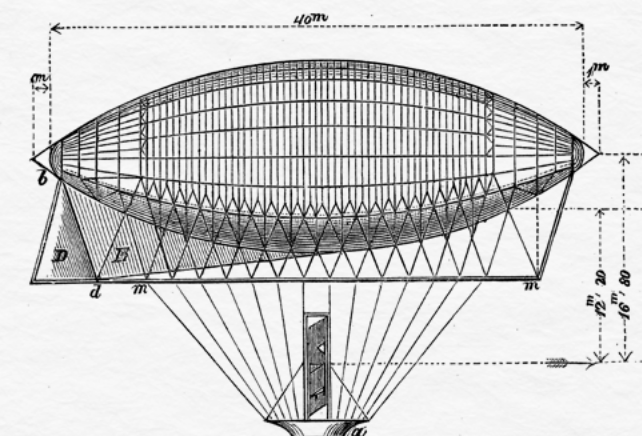
GREECE



**“Adult learning empowers not only artists, but also individuals by providing them with the skills and knowledge needed to achieve personal and professional goals.** It promotes self-confidence, independence and critical thinking. The empowerment of individuals through adult education contributes to societal development by creating a more educated and skilled population.”

KAMILA WITERSKA

POLAND



**“I am introducing a new word - power relation, which means the policy of everyone feeling empowered and having a sense of agency while at the same time taking care of interpersonal relationships and the wellbeing of others.** PowerRelation policy can be implemented by performative education - education through the intentional creation of self and world in action in social interaction.”



## ADULT LEARNING AS A WAY OUT OF:

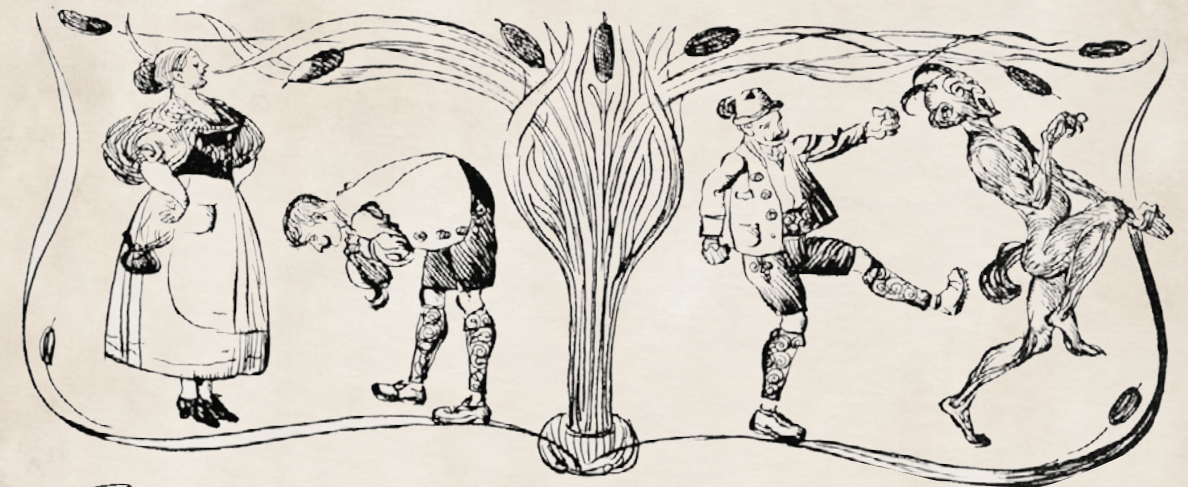
*Inequalities in society;  
change in career plans;  
all of life's challenges; misery;  
dependency; stress; dissatisfaction;  
shackles of insecurity  
and fear; illegality; ageing;  
solitude; routine; boredom;*



*daily routine; poverty; unemployment;  
stagnation; self-doubt; monotony; patterns;  
learned helplessness; being competitive; lack of  
quality education; lack of self-confidence; limited  
opportunities; poor literacy skills; thoughtlessness;  
passivity; discontent; backwardness; vicious  
circle of failure; global challenges; emptiness;  
bad working conditions; inactivity; stereotypes;  
prejudice; low self-esteem;  
digital illiteracy;  
ignorance; insecurity; understanding  
life; personal  
crisis; technological backwardness;  
inaction; lay interest; social-cultural  
integration; global crisis;  
unequal opportunities*



## ADULT LEARNING AS A WAY INTO:



*Active and happy life; goals and dreams; self-sufficiency;  
empowerment; community engagement; progress; personal and  
social life; citizenship; self-realisation; personal improvement;  
transformative education; sharing; sustainable careers; knowledge;  
volunteering; employability; expanded horizons; active  
leisure; fulfilment; opportunity; wellbeing; green mindset;  
growth; self-discovery; critical thinking;  
new beginnings; self-gratitude;  
resilience; lifelong learning;  
enrichment; happiness;  
transversal skills; better work;  
society; new possibilities;  
life change; enjoyment  
of life; personal growth;  
intergenerational connection;  
democracy; justice; meaningful life; understanding; new culture;  
inclusion in society; social inclusion; trust; creativity; future*





Austria



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GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR



**Sonja Karbon**  
VOCATIONAL TRAINER



**Katja Lenič Šalamun**  
PROJECT MANAGER

Belgium



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**Annik Dierckz**  
TEACHER



**Greet Dierckx**  
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**Ingrid Schreyers**  
HUMANITARIAN WORKER



**Pascale Vancrombruggen**  
VOCATIONAL TEACHER



**Anneke Verbruggen**  
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TEACHER



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PEDAGOGUE



**Arnela Sabanovic**  
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**Petra Kupsjak Varmuža**  
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Anita Posavec

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**Dimitrios Zervas**  
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**Éva Szederkényi**  
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**Lucia Ielpo**  
TEACHER



**Renato Luti**  
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ANIMATOR



**Emiliano Manzillo**  
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**Annaleda Mazzucato**  
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**Rita Pieri**  
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Francesco Verderosa

PROFESSOR/SCHOOL  
PRINCIPAL



Agnese Lejniece

EU PROJECT MANAGER



Oksana Soročina

ADULT LEARNER

Lithuania



Vilma Auglytė

TEACHER



Jolanta Čeponaitė

MATHEMATICS TEACHER



Virginija Svediene

ADULT EDUCATOR

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Maria Mifsud

ENGLISH TEACHER



Andrijana Pavicevic

PROFESSOR OF COMPUTER  
SCIENCE



Gea Mulder

LANGUAGE HERO  
NETHERLANDS 2024

Montenegro



Gordana Boskovic

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