

## **Learning Diary (meeting Bristol)**

Telsiai Adult Secondary School is a state institution for adults at the age of 18 or older (in exceptional cases at the age of 16) who have dropped out of the system of education and have decided to continue the interrupted studies. The institution provides them with formal primary, basic and secondary education. At the moment, there are approximately 290 learners who mostly come from disadvantaged groups of society, such as dysfunctional or low education families, remote rural areas or having serious psychological problems. The majority of them live under the threat of poverty and social exclusion. Telsiai Adult Secondary School offers flexible learning opportunities, tries to ensure a quality education which is in line with the needs of an individual living under market economy conditions. We aim to develop an individual's cultural and national identity, to improve the quality of a person's life and integration into modern society.

Telsiai Adult Secondary School has been provided with an opportunity to take part in an international project *Folk without Book – Creating Literacy*. During the period of economic recession, projects funded by the European Union are useful for schools and especially adult institutions in various ways. The international project adds variety to routine, enables to compare our experience with the project partners. Moreover, it is a wonderful opportunity to meet people thinking in a similar way, which was the most exhilarating experience during the first *Fobo* meeting in Bristol. People from six European countries, speaking better or worse English, gathered together to discuss common problems of literacy in our contemporary world. The discussions centred both on the problem of social integration of immigrants and involving disadvantaged groups of society into cultural life. It was an unforgettable experience to watch the people who had come with different expectations, but managed to get closer in their ideas after discussions. It is very important that people who do practical work encouraging people to raise their education levels gathered together to share their work experience with foreign colleagues.

One of the most impressive events of the project meeting was a graffiti tour. On the second day, we went on an amazing tour around Stokes Croft, the most derelict area of Bristol which has been changing every day. We could admire wonderful murals coving walls and doors created by local artists, could see the famous Banksy piece *The Mild Mild West*. On this unique walking tour we met Chris Chalkley, the founder and chairman of the Peoples Republic of Stokes Croft

and other artists. Chris Chalkley is an enthusiastic Bristolian who attempts to turn Stokes Croft into an important cultural quarter of the city. Together with local artists and free-thinkers he prepared the regeneration plan of the area. He says:” We favour bottom up development, rather than top down governance”. That means that a community should decide on its destiny involving all the local people, even those from marginalized groups of society. Working with all the community he also attempts to “offer opportunity for improvement in the lives of the disadvantaged”. His ideas have been thought-provoking and new for us. We admire his enthusiasm and the idea of creating the open art gallery in Stokes Croft. Obviously, graffiti has the power to transform ugly places into awesome pieces of art.

Informal communication plays an important role during international projects, and it helps you to know more about project partners, feel their moods and expectations, culture differences. The first meeting is always the most difficult because you do not know the people, are unsure whether they understand you properly. It was vital to “warm“ the atmosphere in order to break the ice. It happened step by step until all the separating “walls“ were broken down on the third day of the project meeting. On Saturday we greeted each other not only by saying “*Good morning*” but also giving a hug. At a lunch and dinner table, we talked about our families, hobbies, dreams, culture differences which sometimes grew into laughter and dance movements. It was lovely; apart from serious discussions we had a chance to a sincere communication. Obviously, people communicated not only in the project language, i.e. the English language. You could hear them speaking Italian, German and other languages. If you could not understand something in English, other people explained it to you in the language you were able to understand better. It helped to avoid problems in communication. It should be said that such projects make people from far away countries closer and help to establish permanent (hopefully!) contacts.

The meeting in Bristol organized by British partners was a successful development of the project idea. We had the opportunity to see the life of people living in Stokes Croft, the attempt to involve them into community life and feel responsible for improvement of the living area. Free and friendly atmosphere of Stokes Croft prevailed around the discussion table during the meeting. Everyone could express his/her ideas on the development of the project in the future. We hope that congenial atmosphere of Bristol will accompany us in the future and help us to carry out the project successfully.