

## Interview Vilija Lukošūnienė (Soros International House, LT)

### 1. Name and profession / position

Vilija Lukošūnienė. Lithuanian Association of Adult Education (LAAE) Chairwoman of the Board, LAAE Expert on Project Activities, Doctor of Social Sciences, Expert of Adult Education.

### 2. In your opinion, why is multiculturalism and development of adult educators' intercultural communication skills important in Lithuanian society?

The number of cultures in Lithuania is constantly increasing. In addition to the already traditional communities of Russians, Belarusians, Poles, Jews, etc., there are less "familiar" cultures that are recognized primarily externally (skin color, facial features, etc.). For this reason, society as a whole must be educated to understand, reflect on and learn how to deal with cultural diversity, which is one of the tasks of adult educators. However, only someone who has good intercultural communication skills and a deeper understanding of multiculturalism/interculturalism can help. As a result, adult educators themselves need to improve in this area. A great source of learning is international projects that enable learn and experience people from other cultures' "otherness" in reality, not from books. The question is only whether and how the experience of international projects is reflected in terms of intercultural education.

### 3. Briefly describe your work with adult learners. How many of them have been multicultural? How are they different from Lithuanian learners?

In my training I have adult teachers working in various areas of adult learning (adult schools/gymnasiums, museums, libraries, communities, NGOs, colleges). There are people from different cultures in the learning groups I work with who have lived in Lithuania for a long time, so their cultural origins are less widely distinguished. These people come to training to improve, so, when working by andragogic methods and sincerely, people of all cultures are benevolent, curious, and receptive to the content of teaching. Well, if there is one or two people who don't particularly want to get involved in learning, it certainly can't be linked to their cultural origin.

### 4. What is your personal experience with developing your intercultural communication skills?

My experience of intercultural communication skills has been going on for many years, since my studies, when I had to train in German in the then German Democratic Republic. I later worked as a teacher at a school that had close ties to schools in the same GDR; through those connections, I gained personal friends. However, during that period, I would consider myself to have been in a period of "unconscious" intercultural learning, when learning took place from experience but without going into certain theoretical insights. Maybe we didn't even have them in those days. The period of more conscious learning began in 1993, when I started working in the intercultural relations department of the Lithuanian Centre for



Children and Youth as a translator/organizer. When organizing projects, preparing trips for children and youth groups, we had to take an interest in and pass on certain knowledge about other countries, their customs and culture to others. A major incentive for greater access to other cultures was a monthly traineeship for youth workers in Germany (already united) organized by the German Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs. This traineeship was attended by youth workers from 22 countries, so we had a very great opportunity to live in an intercultural environment and experience the nuances of multicultural communication in practice and theory. Another "cornerstone" on the path of personal intercultural learning was laid while already working as an administrator of LAEE, a project manager in a meeting with Mr. R.Hunke, and a German Rheinland in a joint work of the Pfalz Institute for Land Education and Continuation Education. It was she who drew my attention to the deeper points of intercultural communication. Since then, I have become very interested in this area and this interest has grown from self-education to sharing with others: in 2001, I developed the first program of intercultural communication learning, then it was developed and completed. Under it, from 2002 (until 2016), I conducted intercultural communication training at the Lithuanian Institute of Public Administration (LIVADIS) and other educational institutions. In 2015, I developed learning materials for the intercultural competence sub-program in the interactive distance learning system "Adult Learning Information System" ([www.smis.lt](http://www.smis.lt)) developed by the Centre for the Development of Qualifications and Vocational Training. In 2016, I co-authored the Erasmus + mobility programme "Improvement of adult educators competence for the quality of adult learning" with colleagues, which sought to improve the competence of adult educators to work with changing and heterogeneous migrant groups by organizing a traineeship in Italy, a country with extensive experience in working with multicultural groups. I also took part in a traineeship myself, training and deepening my understanding of the complexity of working with people from other cultures.

5. How is teaching multicultural learners different from teaching Lithuanian adult learners? What kind of multicultural activities do you use in your training?

It is necessary, first of all, to familiarize yourself with the basic features of one culture or another, but not to regard them as stereotypical and not to follow that knowledge blindly; you need to monitor the people you interact with. Don't be afraid to admit if you don't understand something in a person's behavior. Be genuinely interested in the culture which learners or project participants come from. Use humor carefully,

6. What is the impact of multicultural educational activities on the learners? Do the relationships between local people and foreigners change? What about the relationship between adult educators and adult learners? Does it really change attitudes and behavior?

Yes, it does. There is a better understanding, people learn not only to see other people as "different", but also to feel that you yourself are "different".

7. Do you have any success stories?

Success stories are implemented projects.

