

DEVELOPING ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP THROUGH ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION. EXPERIENCES FROM AN INTALL WINTER SCHOOL COMPARATIVE WORKING GROUP

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ABSTRACT: Active citizenship became a research issue for adult learning and education in 1995 when the Council of Ministers decided to make 1996 the Year of Lifelong Learning. Moreover, the Lisbon programme, in the year 2000, reinforced the relevance of the issue and, along with employability, connected it to lifelong learning. That is why since 2001 comparative adult learning and education researchers have put a specific focus on analysing active citizenship and bridging it to adult learning. For this very reason, a distinguished Comparative Working Group was formed at the 2019 Winter School of the Erasmus+ INTALL project – on the one hand, to collect different national/regional and local narratives and understandings of active citizenship and, on the other, to gather examples, good practices, formations of active citizens, or trajectories of how to learn for active citizenship as routes and processes of lifelong learning. The same Winter School comparative group tried to analyse the similarities and differences collected in an effort to relate them to existing theoretical frames offered by key authors on the topic, including Baert, Jansen, Jarvis, Johnston, Wildemeersch, and others.

This paper discusses the experiences of the comparative working group and formulates some special conclusions and comments for further actions of comparative studies in adult learning and education.

1. The role of adult learning and education in the development of active citizenship

I presume that the development of democracy depends on more open and accessible forms of education and learning. I also think that democracy depends on people's participation in exercising their rights and taking responsibility for their thinking and actions in both local and global dimensions.

Therefore, it is essential to consider the role of higher education in the promotion of active citizenship through university lifelong learning, which UNESCO (UNESCO, 1998; 2001) found to have a strong impact on active citizenship. Another element of this approach is to recognise the role of adult learning as a tool to develop citizenship and, moreover,

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active citizenship. It is worth reasoning, however, that adult learning and education, in the last two centuries throughout the developed world, has become an essential tool to orient individuals and their communities towards change with a great emphasis on knowledge transfer in formal, non-formal, and informal environments. Likewise, adult learning and education has been used to generate development by balancing the social and the economic through more rights given to ordinary people to change their own thinking by participating in various community actions, including political and economic involvement by social groups or religious formations.

Adult learning and education, after the age of revolutions (1789–1850), started to mean a rather new approach to creating more and more open access to education in adulthood by establishing study circles, special schools for adults (Sunday schools, parochial schools, industrial vocation-based alliances or *Vereine* (in Germany), folk high schools, etc.) and involving higher education in disseminating useful knowledge to a growing number of people (Fieldhouse, 1996; Steele, 2007). This era of ‘free education’ from 1850 to 1920 generated and accelerated a new kind of thinking about schooling, education, and teaching, as well as about access and time and people’s basic rights to learn, to think, to articulate their thoughts, and so on. This resulted in reform-pedagogy or andragogy (the new kind of adult education thinking) based on the work of several scholars dealing with education, philosophy, and – soon after the turn of the century – psychology and sociology.

On the other hand, the two world wars and the great European Civil War from 1914 to 1945 brought tensions and gave way to Nationalism, Nazism, Fascism, and Communism, which did not permit the rise and stabilization of modern democratic and civic societies, even in different ways and venues (Nuissl & Pehl, 2000).

It was only after 1945–1950 that democratisation and human rights could be universally declared essential both for modern societies and for their individual members. It also turned out that another fifty years were needed in Europe for the Central-Eastern part of the continent to leave behind dictatorship and build liberal market economies and democratic societies (Németh, 2014).

And yet, adult learning and education today mirrors the fact that access to learning is not for everyone and that ‘equal opportunities’ is a neat slogan but difficult to realise for every single citizen of a country. On the one hand, adult learning is considered an important tool for adults to develop their skills; on the other, it is expected to make adults recognise that change is something that they ought to make use of and not simply endure. This is a recognition of the fact that European education and training policy, as formulated in the famous White Paper of the EU Commission in 1995 (EC, 1995), is driven by a rather individualistic

approach. The White Paper called attention, amongst other important issues, to second-chance schooling, an important benchmark of today's lifelong learning in Europe. Furthermore, another White Paper on governance by the European Commission (EC, 2001) pointed out that a more humanistic approach to the realisation of proper governance would require particular forms of collaboration with citizens, involving active and deliberate participation, responsibility, and dignity regarding their communities and other local formations of social care and development.

In the last fifteen years, European education and training policy slowly but distinctively turned to adult learning, highlighting several issues in two communications (the second an action plan), but not active citizenship (EC, 2006; 2007).

Active citizenship was mainly used in reference to lifelong learning in response to pressure coming from UNESCO and some academic circles to fight back the narrow and rather reductionist views of education focusing on the economy and employability.

2. *Understanding citizenship and active citizenship*

According to Baert, active citizenship is an open-ended process for which no single definition exists (Baert, 2003). Another essential distinction is that education and higher education are important for learning citizenship skills and building collective and multiple identities. Therefore, higher education helps

to facilitate the *critical interrogation* of dominant cultural codes and symbols in order to help finding connections between power and culture, to encourage the *exploration* of cultural perspectives and codes embedded in *different meanings*, values and views, and *personalising the political so as to* deconstructing dominant codes of information by discovering personal experiences of learning citizenship (Jansen, 2003:43-55).

Johnston, however, pointed out that we can learn about citizenship when learning is about citizenship as *status*, but we can also learn through citizenship when we reflect on the *experiences (practice) of individual and collective citizenship*. Also, we can learn for citizenship, which means *active citizenship* (Johnston, 2005).

If we share such a model of learning combined with citizenship, we ought to consider that citizenship is generally related to rights (civil, political, and social) and participation. On the other hand, according to Baert, *active citizenship is about the conscious practice of rights and the recognition of status*. It means that the challenge is to redefine democratic citizenship and social responsibility, which are both at risk. Eventually, we have to

find a balance between individual freedom and collective interest, and that is where participatory competencies play a role (Baert, 2003). One can agree with Longworth's argument that «encouraging active citizenship means that celebrating learning is connected with active citizenship by individuals, families, organisations and communities» (Longworth, 2006:86–88). It is not at all surprising, therefore, that Longworth connected active citizenship and the development of learning cities and regions: «One of the most important indicators of successful learning cities and regions is the extent to which their citizens participate in active citizenship programmes that enhance community living, learning and social cohesion» (Longworth, 2006:153) I think that higher education and related university-based lifelong learning need to promote such city-region development through learning.

Jarvis pointed out in his famous Helsinki speech in September 2000 that lifelong learning was a key factor in raising socially essential forms of capital – namely, social capital based on ‘value-rationality’ – through developing human resources and through strengthening and developing learning competencies and skills (Jarvis, 2001). In 2004, Jarvis underlined the importance of the issue of active citizenship as an integral part of European lifelong learning policy (Jarvis, 2004). At the same time, he argued that «*citizenship is now a responsibility rather than a right*» and that there «*is still a fundamental conceptual difference between citizenship and active citizenship – the one about rights and the other about the exercise of responsibility*» (Jarvis, 2004:12, my emphasis).

Also, he pointed to the emergence and spread of the model of the *knowledge-based society*, which he claimed had played a key role, together with the harsh constraints brought on by the global economic crisis, in Europe's renewed focus on education and training to promote growth, competitiveness, and employability through combined actions and responsibilities of member states and their citizens. Jarvis clearly indicated that the *Memorandum* (EC, 2000) conceives of responsible citizens as active (employed!) members of society, taking actions to solve the problems in their environment. The role of education and training, he concluded, is to help the individual become an employable and active citizen in their community (EC, 2000:14).

Higher education institutions also joined the discussion on lifelong learning with a more intensive involvement through EUA (the European University Association)¹ and, after 2002, through EUCEN (the European Universities Lifelong Learning Network)². From that time onwards, a significant number of academic researchers have indicated

¹ EUA Trend-reports: <www.eua.be> (07/2020).

² More on EUCEN: <<http://eucen.eu>> (07/2020).

that a new systemic framework is under construction in education and training which aims to generate more quality, partnership-based development, and the dissemination of knowledge through ICT-based tools (Field, 2007).

Those trends of the past fifteen years made us revisit the topic of active citizenship in the context of the Erasmus+ INTALL Winter School programme for 2019. For this reason, the organisers of the project called for a specific Comparative Working Group to discuss some recent challenges and issues referring to active citizenship and its relevance to adult learning and education. The call in the bulletin of the 2019 Winter School underlined the specific comparative dimensions we had drawn for this programme right at the beginning of fall 2018 by recognising that active citizenship became a research issue in adult and lifelong learning in 1995 through the preparation of 1996 as the Year of Lifelong Learning and through the planning and initiation of the Lisbon process, which combined lifelong learning with the goals of employability. The approach tried to emphasise the collection of country-specific examples referring to models, approaches, and practices (Winter School 2019 Student Guide, 2019).

The co-organisers underlined that the Working Group would encourage participating students to make use of their country/region-specific studies to relate the topic of active citizenship to adult education and lifelong learning and, consequently, relate and compare their findings to:

- the meaning of active citizenship in the countries/regions represented by group members;
- the practices of active citizenship in the countries/regions represented;
- available strategies on adult education and lifelong learning with references/contexts of active citizenship.

Other contexts of comparison were connected to:

- the roles/impacts of existing or missing law;
- the impact of existing/missing policies;
- the influence of existing/missing discourse amongst civil society groups on the roles of adult education to promote and develop active citizenship.

The call recommended some specific categories of comparison and claimed that participating students ought to search and identify some good practices reflecting:

- community-based learning activities to raise participation in adult and lifelong learning;
- learning festivals, adult learners' weeks to integrate members of vulnerable groups;
- specific intercultural programmes to strengthen identity and belonging;

- local/regional initiatives, formations to develop collaborations, understanding recognition and trust amongst communities and their members;
- examples of collecting and sharing valuable knowledge and skills around labour, community, and the environment with sustainability concerns.

The coordinators of the Working Group had collected and made available some key readings for students to contextualise the main focus of the Comparative Working Group and to relate the topic to the overall programme of the 2019 Winter School.

It is very important to highlight the roles of preparatory online lectures and, more importantly, the consultation amongst coordinators and students in the Working Group. These environments enabled students to formulate their essays in a way that both addressed questions around the main topic of the Working Group and collected some relevant good practices to lay the groundwork for the comparative work of the second week of the Winter School. Generally, the comparative work was based on the country-specific narratives students represented.

3. The input of participating master's students

There were six master-level students – three from Italy, two from the Korean Republic, and one from Azerbaijan – who enrolled in the Comparative Working Group and provided country/region-specific ‘transnational essays’ on active citizenship through adult education and lifelong learning with specific dimensions.

Ms. Daria Chiellini and Ms. Chiara D’Urso provided a joint essay on *Participation through art to foster active citizenship: The cases of Tuscany and Sardinia*.

Ms. An Sohee and Ms. Kim Junghyun wrote their essay on *Developing active citizenship through adult learning and education in Korea*.

Ms. Martina Scapin wrote her essay on *Developing active citizenship through adult learning and education: A comparative research among European and Italian policies*.

Ms. Naila Ismayilova’s essay dealt with *Challenges of adult education in Azerbaijan*.

Students had the opportunity to engage in ongoing consultations on WueCampus (Moodle Platform of University of Würzburg), which has been specifically developed for the Winter School series. Together with Professor Heribert Hinzen, we counselled the abovementioned students on how to improve their essays to meet the criteria of the Working Group and to finalise their works by mid-January for uploading and cross-read-

ing amongst fellow group members. Those consultations were also used to develop those essays in terms of format, style, contents, and references. Students were guided on how to properly use some basic methods of comparative research on active citizenship when trying to identify reasons for selecting their focus on the country-specific field referring to their countries/regions together with some specific choices and limitations to be identified.

It is necessary to discuss the five essays we received from the students in the Comparative Working Group. The essays discussed below brought in some valuable contexts of citizenship and active citizenship through country-specific realities:

Essay 1. Ms. Daria Chiellini and Ms. Chiara D'Urso (Italy) provided a joint essay on *Participation through art to foster active citizenship: The cases of Tuscany and Sardinia*.

This first essay from Italy presented a particular focus on the impact of art as a tool for promoting participation and motivation in the framework of active citizenship. The first chapter explored the concepts of democracy, lifelong learning, and participation, and how those subjects might be conceived in the European scheme. In the second chapter, the essay explored current European and Italian policies and collected some particularly relevant policies in Tuscany and Sardinia on active citizenship that were implemented through projects. The third chapter focused on certain practices from those two regions. Therefore, national practices were reflected by the frame of *Cittadinanzattiva* and compared to examples of Tuscany and Sardinia on how art may stimulate the inclusion of people of all ages.

This essay came to the conclusion that more could be done to develop active citizenship and to foster the inclusion of citizens into community matters. It recognised the lack of proper provision of information for citizens about the opportunities available to them. Another conclusion was that more attention was paid to citizens' participation at the regional level; however, those particular regions exhibited some significant differences. Tuscany was considered more active with its rich resources and practices, but both regions brought practices of urban regeneration as examples of effective implementation. Adult education could well make use of the topic indirectly by involving people through community-based actions to get acquainted with different customs, traditions, values, and so on, which may promote trust and tolerance within their communities.

Let us underline that the structure of the essay served the comparative approach by working with examples and practices from the highlighted Italian regions. The essay was written with quality style and incorporated quality references.

Essay 2. Ms. An Sohee and Ms. Kim Junghyun (Republic of Korea) wrote their essay on *Developing active citizenship through adult learning and education in Korea*.

This second essay from the Republic of Korea analysed the scope of promoting active citizenship through raising the practical capacities, abilities, and qualities considered necessary to effectively and actively participate in the learning society. The essay pointed out that the Korean narratives of active citizenship cannot be separated from life experiences based on participatory democracy. The two authors of the essay explained that it means to make the life world more democratic and rationally form a public point of view by learning and practicing autonomy, responsibility, and co-operation in civil society.

In Korea, active citizenship learning, in terms of actual discourses in adult education, is achieved through experience in building democratic relationships in real life. Also, this concept reflects the aim to address social and economic inequalities and to restore social justice based on the traditions of adult education, such as radical adult education and mass education. The concept of active citizenship is therefore called 'democratic citizenship', a term that links education to its role to form democratic citizens through adult education and lifelong education. However, it must be underlined that, according to the essay, forming democratic citizens through education is a kind of civil education led by civil society, in other words, people's lifeworld. In this regard, referring to Korea's special situation, education for democracy, or education for active citizenship, means education as part of a specific social movement to build a civil society in accordance with the democratic movement.

The authors pointed out that such democratic education includes civil politics education and education related to civil movements to realise various kinds of politics of life. In this context, practitioners would talk of 'publicity' in what citizenship is. It is, according to the narrative of the essay, to reflect publicity as an agreed value within democratic processes, so it explains why civic groups are called 'democratic civic education' instead of 'civil education'.

The essay collected some specific cases of active citizenship development and civil engagement programmes, for example the *civic engagement programme of the Hope Institute*, providing a detailed description of each programmes with reference to active citizenship.

Another case focused on the *Guro District Citizen Leader Academy of Seoul National University*, a complex development programme based on the four types of learning according to Delors (Delors, 1996). Its aim is to train special trainers to develop activities for local communities around democratic citizenship and participatory actions.

Essay 3. Ms. Martina Scapin (Italy) wrote her essay on *Developing active citizenship through adult Learning and education: A comparative research among European and Italian policies*.

This essay related citizenship to *European citizenship* and elaborated on recent contexts of the development of citizens both in social and political

dimensions referring to skills development, employability, and the social integration of youth as part of the European approach.

In the case of the Italian policy, the development of citizens through job promotion was explained using the specific practices of *La Buona Scuola*, *Garanzia Giovani Italia*, and *Servizio Civile*. Those policy practices give people interested in the topic of citizenship an understanding of the implications that have to be recognised to get the meanings of those 'good practices' to follow the introductory chapters.

The author linked her essay to three different cases. The *Model to dream* was selected as a recent initiative to help tackle social exclusion amongst young people in order to fight back racism, violence, and xenophobia by providing open discourses on the true life stories of young adults turning into collaborative and open actions. The second practice, *App Cittadini attivi*, illustrates the way citizens in the city of Padua can indicate problems and, accordingly, make suggestions about neighbourhood services, safety, and the like.

Thirdly, the author mentioned a personal example. Namely, it turned out that the *MA programme in Management of Educational Services and Lifelong Learning can also be recognised as a valuable basis* to help young adults engaged in community and social developments to collect relevant skills, knowledge, and practical experience, for example, through the international collaborations of universities by addressing challenging topics where adult and lifelong learning may help. This thought also informed the conclusion of the essay.

Essay 4. Ms. Naila Ismayilova (Azerbaijan), in her essay, dealt with *Challenges of adult education in Azerbaijan*.

The fourth essay took a special approach to the topic of the Comparative Working Group by describing a specific situation of citizenship education and the promotion of such activities. The case of Azerbaijan was thoroughly elaborated through understanding the structure and mechanisms of adult education and, consequently, the roles of civil society organisations in the launch of a relatively successful campaign to raise participation and performance among adult learners.

The essay collected some relevant drivers of change and identified the concrete opportunities of and barriers to the development of adult education, together with citizenship education as a significant field of practice provided by civil society organisations collaborating with stakeholders active in the field, together with groups representing local and regional public claims and trying to turn it to social actions of support, exchange, and development. Another challenge indicated in the essay concerns the difficulty of getting top-down policy approaches to meet and recognise bottom-up struggles and actions of civil society.

The conclusion of the essay called for adult and youth education to become part of development programmes in order to raise young adults'

basic skills and civic skills along with improving their VET skills and social skills.

4. The challenge and limitation of global citizenship - conclusions

Prior to its active knowledge exchange at the Würzburg Winter School, the Comparative Working Group was influenced by the topic of global citizenship, that is, the challenges of socio-political responsibilities, environmental concerns, identity issues, and collaborations when forming communities and neighbourhoods through cities and regions.

Professor Hinzen, Former Director at DVV International and UIL advisor on Adult and Lifelong Learning, joined our Comparative Working Group as co-moderator. He pointed out the directions and main focuses of global citizenship and its impact on, for example, the Sustainable Development Goals, regional focuses of adult and lifelong learning to highlight similarities and differences between Europe, Asia and the South-Pacific, Africa, the Arab World, and Latin-America. For this reason, the Comparative Group worked to identify reasons for those similarities and differences in the approaches to and development programmes in citizenship education in the countries/regions represented in the group.

Therefore, not only the context of active citizenship but also the local and global dimensions of its development signalled some particularly important choices and limitations participants highlighted in their group work and the presentations they gave to other members of the Winter School. In this respect, the Winter School became a good foundation for collecting and sharing knowledge with intercultural perspectives in a comparative frame.

Finally, we have to highlight the results of the comparison as a major outcome of the Comparative Working Group:

- Although it was rather difficult for the student members of the working groups to effectively apply analytical comparative tools in their papers to study their countries, the topic of citizenship allowed them, on the one hand, to identify some significant similarities and differences in country-specific cases and, on the other, to identify a number of reasons for those similarities and differences.
- Moreover, students of this particular Comparative Working Group strongly focused on collecting practical examples of learning for citizenship and learning through citizenship, incorporating those examples/cases into their analysis as part of their country-specific transnational essays.
- Another outcome of the Winter School are students' improved skills in comparative analysis and studies in the field of adult education and

lifelong learning. They learned to use their comparative work to gain a better understanding of adult learning and education in the countries they represent, identifying similarities and differences on the basis of collected and shared practices and theories relevant to their topics.

- Eventually, students improved their skills working with internationally available documents, data, and publications (online and print) to support their reasoning.

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