Greece

Working Paper

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Adult Education as a Means to Active Participatory Citizenship

Adult Education as a Means to Active Participatory Citizenship (EduMAP)

EduMAP is a Horizon 2020 research project focusing on adult education among young adults at risk of social exclusion. Particular attention is paid to educational policies and practices needed to foster active citizenship among vulnerable young people.

1. Challenges in AE provision and access

The six cases studied do not seem to share many challenging issues. Challenges differ depending on the reference group, conditions of vulnerability and type of AE programmes.

There are some similarities however in the cases for "VET for long term unemployed" and for "Empowering NEETs". Some of the similar challenging issues that were reported in both cases relate to the provision of the right mix of skills for the local labour market; reform career guidance to deliver effective advice for all the participants; to ensure trainers were well-prepared with industry experience, to make full use of workplace learning, and to develop tools to engage stakeholders and promote transparency. The educators in both cases had a more inside view of the challenges faced in the programme particularly in relation to APC competence acquirement. These expressed challenges however seem to be more related to the profile of the trainees rather than the programme itself. The major challenges were the weakness of student profile, the lack of counselling that results from the basic education, domestic pressure in the education choice of the trainees, lack of self-confidence, the negative view on blue-collar workers, the low socio-economic family structure, and low level of students' success coming from basic education. The programmes' challenges related more to the ability to allocate time, develop and prioritize goals, trainees' ability to participate as members of a team, and communicate with other trainees, and know how social, organizational and technological systems work and how to operate them. The latter was strictly related to trainers' capacity. For a number of VYAs the biggest challenge was the methods used in the programme which required from them to take responsibility for their own learning. Not all of them were likely to work well as they suggested because the activities occasionally demanded practising many things at the same time for instance feedback, helping others, real-world problem solving, enquiry, learning on the fly, being coached and various kinds of simulation and role playing.

For the case "Non-formal education for the homeless" different challenges emerge as the programme progresses. Some of these challenges relate to the fact that a number of homeless youth participants are significantly more susceptible to physical health ailments due to their prolonged exposure to the elements in all seasons, performing personal hygiene routines in public spaces, eating in overcrowded public shelters, and being on their feet for long periods of time. Compromised health can also have an impact on one's ability to obtain and maintain work according to another educator, even for a person who is young. Substance use becomes a problem for anyone when it impairs one's ability to carry out daily tasks, maintain relationships and obtain and retain a job. For some homeless youth in the centre, higher rates of substance use and addictions can be traced to their response to the challenges of life on the streets – having to deal with depression, trauma, violence, unresolved issues from their past, and in many cases, emerging mental illness – which leads many to greater risk-taking behaviours and the tendency to self-medicate with illicit drugs. For some, substance use is the outcome of the struggle to survive. Some frustration was also voiced about the fragmentation of services and the perception that you can only access leisure opportunities if you are a regular

services user at the host organisation.

The biggest challenge in the case of "Social integration of migrants" is the language barrier for both trainers and trainees. Other challenges relate to the fear or anxiety participants express that also affects them in how they share their experience during workshops.

For the "Transgender intervention" case the major challenge for the programme is to acquire more visibility among the trans and LGB community but also operate as a pilot programme for similar courses in many more cities and also attract cisgenders as well as parents and family members of the trans and LGB participants. The course would be equally enlightening for parents and family members and the greatest challenge is that it is not certified.

Low participation and high numbers of drop-outs was a routine in the first years of the "Roma action plan" programme, as most participants easily discredited the programme. The greatest number of young Roma women that drop out of the programme are because of repentance and absenteeism is just as often met among Roma ethnicity. Among the reasons that determine the apparition of these phenomena the following are referred to: reduced financial possibilities, family problems (work around the house for their children, the caring for younger siblings), deficient relations with the other women from the classroom, a defective affective climate form by the classroom as a result of the existence of social representation from the majority of women and a low level of acceptance and integration. Roma women themselves add that the greatest challenge for them is to create relevance of what they learn to their own lives. Some suggest that they want to change their community to the better but they occasionally find that their families are not as supportive as they initially expected.

2. Gender and diversity aspects tackled in the studied programmes

In terms of gender diversity the majority of the cases do not address the issue of diversity. In some cases the participants are only young men as in the case for "Non-formal education for the homeless". "Transgender intervention" and "Roma action plan" however they serve different agendas regarding the matter. Courses in "Transgender intervention" are explicitly focused on gender diversity. The courses are enlightening in the sense that they reveals to participants much of the potential they never felt they had. The methods that are used are all experience-based with small groups reflection, constant use of life examples and circumstances from both participants and trainers, and empowering teaching techniques. The fight against racism and discrimination based on gender identity or expression but also on sexual orientation, the systematic recording of incidents of violence, the promotion of equal treatment, with respect human dignity and the sensitization of society are only some of the issues that are addressed in the programme.

In "Roma action plan" the rationale and type of action is similar, but the reference groups is different as it only focuses on women. Here the issues addressed are more labour market relevant with the immediate contribution of the local community, local employers and some relevant social partners.

Last but not least in the "Social integration of migrants" programme communication is occasionally challenging, but trainers claim that these are essentially orientation courses mostly for women with children who are either immigrants or refugees who have applied for an asylum and they need to know the basics of the language and the social, legal and health system in Greece in order to help themselves with finding their way through bureaucracy and public administration. The methods used are largely experience-based and the workshops are organised around a discussion on a certain theme each time (i.e. legal authorities, discussion in Greek with a public authority, etc.). As there is no official state programme to provide these women relevant support as the majority are very low educated, this programme covers the basics for achieving a minimum learning outcome along with psychological support as well as assistance during their intermediate period they stay in the country after they apply for an asylum and until a decision from the official state is made.

3. The concept of APC as it is defined, understood or approached in the context of the study by different respondent groups

Policymakers: At the moment APC is only considered in the frame of basic social, legal and health support that are vital for the participants. Although Greece has developed and provides educational programmes for adults that are part of socially disadvantaged groups (low skilled, low income, Roma, long-term unemployed, adults with disabilities, migrants, etc.), there are no upcoming plans for assessing and validating the informal learning of these adults despite efforts to develop a mass system of recognition of non-formal learning. Furthermore, what has not yet been directly addressed is the educational and learning needs of disadvantaged youth and particularly those under the current economic condition education for unemployed youth and youth in poverty. In line with this, the possibility of programmes that will address poverty management for the next five years can also be included in the policy priorities.

Educators: APC is seen as a medium rather than an objective. It is not seen as a direct competence that can be achieved through the programme. APC is a great challenge according to most of the adult educators. Some of them envisage it as an objective that appears in all policy rhetoric but it has no real value for education for VYAs if the policies for young vulnerable adults remain unchanged and unfavourable for many of them. APC is largely undermined by the State for many of them. Policy decisions do not include all vulnerability aspects and therefore targeting APC in adult education for some vulnerable groups will not provide any help to the learners unless policy making becomes more inclusive. What is needed is proactive measures that include young migrants and refugees to the system upon their arrival instead of transitional support programmes that literally force the development of a gap between the society and the young refugees. An open education system that embraces diversity in all its forms regardless of religion and ethnicity can easily overshadow any APC education programme.

Learners/Participants: For the majority of learners/participants APC is related to knowing where you stand in the society rather than how to promote changes to it. That includes understanding how the society as well as the labour market operate and trying to adapt to the codes and the rules that apply. In some cases as with "Transgender intervention" and "Roma action plan" APC refers to specific learning expectations that somehow shake the way/s in which particular social groups operate within society. Some VYAs claimed that learning more technical skills or accomplishing life related issues that are APC relevant such as drafting a proposal for a petition all give anxiety. This anxiety is magnified at times with participants as they are slower and less confident in many social arenas and tend to make more errors. The majority of the learners however also suggest that apart from trying to feel safe, they must also keep motivated and understand the relevance of APC to their real lives.

4. Elements that are critical and or significant for enabling learners to become active citizens, or to develop APC competencies in the studied programmes

There is an array of elements in each programme, which vary based on the type, the audience, the pedagogical approach and the outputs of the programme. These elements are summed to the following eight:
1. learning and embracing failure;
2. strengthening the community against social inequality;
3. providing a safe space for reflection without prejudice;
4. providing space for building social and cultural capital;
5. promoting activism at local level;
6. learning to communicate using different codes and/or language;
7. sharing of personal stories;
8. never feel neglected or unsupported.

5. Competencies and qualifications possessed, represented and/or cultivated through by the AE practitioners who contribute to the design, development and delivery of APC programmes for VYAs

All the trainers/educators have to be certified by the National Organisation for Accreditation and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP). The trainers/educators that were interviewed have all HE degrees in business, economics and/or law, they have also received educational training to be certified as adult trainers and some of them are also entrepreneurs having their own businesses. All of them nonetheless have suggested that they have a real need in course design and development as well as developing some transversal skills (intercultural communication, networking, diversity management, development of learning resources). They further suggest that it is impossible to empower the learners if they are themselves not empowered and self-reflective. Some claimed that the meetings operate almost as group therapy sessions for them as well although this is not the purpose of the course.

For the case of "Roma action plan" in particular despite the skills that one may have, what is really needed to work with the Roma women is a good knowledge of their family background and their needs. Empathy as well as managing diversity are the two competences they value very high when it comes to counselling the young Roma women and particularly when it comes to provide personal advice on issues that relate to job finding, drafting a CV or presenting oneself to the local employer. As all of them have suggested addressing the young women's needs is more of a priority than completing the training tasks as these have been designed. If the participants feel at any stage neglected or understand that the programme is more important for the educators than their needs, it is very likely that they will drop-out. The programme is now designed ad-hoc every time based on the participants needs, because during the first years of its implementation there was a high number of drop-outs and the community did not support the programme.

6. Critical factors and conditions (favourable and unfavourable) that affect the potential of AE policies to cultivate APC for VYAs

Favourable conditions:
- The existing national lifelong learning strategy (Law 3879/2010).
- Strengthening the involvement of regional and local communities, higher education institutions, social partners and civil society organisations.
- State-funded structures.
- Enhancement of skills and competences of the adult population.

Unfavourable conditions:
- Lack of measures for the support of the development and interconnection of relevant services, the co-operation of stakeholders with relevant social partners remains insubstantial.
- Lack of reliable quality assurance framework.
- Policies for young vulnerable adults remain unchanged.
- Inequalities in access to adult education that are further reflected in the extremely low participation of migrants and refugees.
- Low participation rates.

7. Lessons learnt from laws and policies that contribute effectively to cultivating APC for VYAs

The major policy target for the Greek Government is to ensure those mechanisms that will endorse and improve the effectiveness of the existing National Strategy for Lifelong Learning, so that the ongoing as well as the planned interventions meet the local needs, are linked to the needs of the labour market and are targeted to the target groups' particular needs. To this end, initiatives for combating early school leaving, matching education and VET with labour market needs, resolving issues of access and raising adult participation rates in education appear as the main challenges for the system.

The most recent developments at policy level stress an ambitious and comprehensive reform effort that has been under way in the past ten years (2005 onwards). It cannot be predicted whether existing and new policies and measures to further develop the already established adult education and VET structures as well as the reform of the apprenticeship system, will have the expected impact, as this will demand closer collaboration between the state and the social partners (i.e. GSEE, GSEVEE, SETE and SEV) both in terms of developing a new pattern for social dialogue, and decision making based on evidence from documented good practices. It also requires a higher degree of acceptance of these measures by Greek society. Significant measures have been legislated, but their mix and implementation so far is uneven. This ultimately demands a better dissemination strategy of the agreed measures in the field of adult education through stressing their benefits particularly for the most vulnerable adults (i.e. unemployed young adults aged between 24-30, low skilled and NEETs as well as migrants and refugees). It is important to monitor who participates in adult education in Greece, assessing why, and how much it is needed. Considering the profile of those who already participate (mainly women; employed with ISCED 4 or higher)[1] the state is also faced with the challenge of reassessing existing measures by prioritising relevant outreach projects at regional and local levels. EU structural funds should be better exploited to boost investment in adult education. Last but not least, close collaboration with research institutes and universities as well as participation in international cyclical large scale studies like PIAAC is needed. Greece ranks around the OECD average in education and skills[2]. This can provide a basis for finally opening the discussion on human resource management, with focus on issues like increasing the relevance of VET offers and predicting anticipated future needs. Plans should be evaluated systematically, employers should be more involved, and a system to detect current and future needs in terms of skills needs has to be created.

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[1]Available at www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/Skills-Matter-Greece.pdf
[2]Available at www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/Skills-Matter-Greece.pdf

8. Existing practices of information access and communication (emerging patterns and tendencies; people/social networks; media/platforms/channels; content/messages) about adult education in the studied programmes

A rather diverse way of practices can be identified based on the type of the programme, the audience or the target groups and the available resources.

Within "Non-formal education for the homeless", the role of engagement involves the process by which they adapt to environments not structurally suited for habitation. According to some interviewees in cases of street dwelling, the environment provides a spectrum of varying circumstances that require adaptation and flexibility. The individual both creates and adjusts to the environment to establish fit. In other words, engagement focuses on the way one chooses the environment and how such a choice caters to personal goals. For example, one participant's choice to sleep on church steps involves a need to create and manipulate an environment such that the participant's needs or goals are satisfied. Goals may include sleeping, use of recreational drugs, and the like. However, such implications involve acknowledgement of personal strengths and capabilities. Given the context of each individual interviewed in relation to the environment, interaction requires an understanding of the individual's self-perception, ones' status within the environment, and the relationships developed within the environment. This means that environmental interaction involves a form of attachment or environmental use.

For all the other cases existing practices of information access and communication include the following:

- Face to face communication.
- E-mail is used for the communication between AE practitioners and VYAs.
- Communication in a different (non-native) language.
- Online platform.
- Smartphone applications.
- Social media to stay in touch with other learners.

9. Leveraging on VYA's information access and communication practices about adult education

For all cases studied the most popular and widely used ways for accessing and being informed on adult education programmes are the following:

- Personal and face to face communication.
- Web-based communication such as e-mail is widely used.
- Communication in a non-native/foreign language is also applicable in some cases as well as communication via an interpreter.
- Smartphone applications for text messaging are very popular.
- Social media like facebook is widely used.

The only case in which diverse leveraging is evident in the "Non-formal education for the homeless". At first glance, educating the homeless appears to be a low priority in terms of providing meaningful assistance to this population. This essentially needs to change it receives some added value. To some people, the idea of literacy training for homeless adults seems ancillary. The literacy instructors themselves concede that for people who have no home, no income, and no family to lean on, education takes a back seat to more pressing needs. Nevertheless, providing a meal for the day does not prepare the participants for the challenges of tomorrow. We also need to take into account that one of the consequences of young adults' homelessness is being forced to withdraw from school. In some cases, the contributing factors that led to a young person's homelessness also had an impact on their school success. In other words, they were already at risk of dropping out. In other cases, school may not have been affected. However, when homelessness results in an individual having to leave their community, dropping out of school becomes an even more likely result, regardless of school performance to that point. Once on the streets, returning or continuing school becomes a real challenge. Without access to affordable housing, adequate income, proper nutrition, and trusting supportive adults, school is often not a realistic possibility for homeless young adults. In Greece, the approach to homelessness and the infrastructure in place to respond to it typically does not support young homeless adults who wish to return to, or stay in school. By denying homeless young adults with adequate opportunities to obtain an education, is like condemning such young people to a life of poverty.

Given their life context, Internet and social media may act as resource for these otherwise resource-poor adults in many ways. The interactive and informative nature of the Internet creates an environment amenable to learning, confidence, and self-empowerment. Usually use the internet to communicate, establish and maintain relationships, find information on a variety of issues, and for recreational and entertainment purposes. Homeless young adults were using their time online to have fun, socialize, and pursue resources such as housing, medical care (mostly finding information on symptoms for diseases), and employment. While it is encouraging that homeless young adults are pursuing employment and housing related activities online, one also needs to acknowledge that these adults' computer and internet literacy might be limited. Computer classes could be offered where these skills can be learned and honed. Since, most employment applications are now submitted online, caseworkers could work with these youth to locate these

opportunities and assist them in creating their resumes and foster other online job etiquette skills such as inquiring about employment opportunities over e-mail. The ubiquity of internet use among homeless youth also opens up the possibility of delivering interventions online. It is entirely possible that homeless young adults who are more digital media savvy are capable of both making internet searches for housing or jobs and using the internet to effectively communicate with their social networks.

10. Information accessed and used during the design of AE for APC programmes

All programmes are organised ad-hoc. The design of each programme (with some variations) involves the following accessed information:

− EOPPEP job descriptions.
− Existing curricula that have been developed within the organization in the past.
− Education and pedagogical departments in HE institutions.
− Relevant literature.
− Evaluation reports of similar programmes and courses in other EU countries.
− Relevant EU funded projects (e.g. ERASMUS+ KA2, LLP projects, etc.).
− Personal stories and biographies.

In addition to the above however many adult educators suggested that diversity –as an overarching concept in designing APC programmes– is both a challenge and chance for (new) learning strategies in adult education. For many adult educators *diversity management* is a key issue. Diversity describes the many unique characteristics and qualities that make a person (or VYA learner in this case) similar to or different from others. Some of these characteristics might be apparent; while other characteristics such as ethnicity, disability, religion, financial status, age, value, cultural background and many others may not be apparent based on first impressions. It is imperative that adult educators do not judge learners based on assumptions and must treat everyone fairly and equitably. For some more experienced adult educators who work with refugees and transgender young adults diversity also encompasses the *multitude of experiences, aptitudes and attitudes* available in today's multicultural societies. Educators need to encourage students to think critically, add value to the class by participating, and to synergize as teams or as a whole class. Appreciating, understanding and valuing personal differences in each individual learner can eliminate groupthink in the classroom as well as in the boardroom as some of them mentioned. Groupthink is a pattern of faulty and biased decision making that occurs in groups whose members strive for agreement, among themselves, at the expense of accurately assessing information relevant to a decision. Groupthink is not a desirable objective in today's diverse and very sophisticated world for many adult educators. This usually happens in homogeneous teams and groups because everyone's societal values tend to be similar as they claim. Diverse teams can achieve synergistic results if they appreciate, understand and value their differences effectively. Synergy is where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

For many participants in the "Social integration of migrants", "Transgender intervention", and "Roma action plan" cases, the most common theme emerging from the experiences was the belief that their *backgrounds* made them social outsiders within the local community. They had all experienced social exclusion and difficulty in developing localised, supportive social networks. Their educators also suggested that during the programme the encountered certain differences in how male and female refugee students relate to and understand material presented in

the classroom. Furthermore, refugee males have been found to have more of a succinct speaking style, whereas, refugee females communicated in a storytelling style. While many females prefer a circular style of group discussion so everyone can be heard, seen and acknowledged; males tend to prefer the lecture style where the group is directed and the meeting can be brought to a closure in a timely manner. Also transgender females tend to put more focus on the process (how we get there). Such differences may exist in the classroom as well and adult educators need to recognize and capitalize on such differences appropriately as per their course learning outcomes as many educators noted. Understanding and respecting such differences can create an "inclusive learning environment" where groupthink is avoided and synergistic results flow infinitely as learners think for themselves and stretch their abilities beyond their existing boundaries as most adult educators suggest.