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Working Paper

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Edu•MAP

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 three cases studied in Finland, "VET in prison", "Virtual School" and "VALMA, preparatory studies for VET", shared similarities regarding challenges in AE provision and access but they also featured many unique case-specific issues.

On the supply side, the different (and often complex) public funding schemes have an affect on the organisers' offerings of AE programmes. Changes in funding, legislation and the increase of project funding from the EU and other sources, further complicate the picture. Keeping track of national policy or the various project-based funding schemes is a challenge to educational organisers and guidance personnel. When funding is cut or reorganised, the more vulnerable learners are often most affected (downsizing, less contact instruction, bigger class sizes etc.), as they require more resources from educational organisers.

A general problem *on the demand side*, is the lack of suitable education for students with special support needs. However, getting access to AE might not always be the biggest problem for youth in vulnerable life situations, but for instance; how to consolidate other acute needs and (possible) health issues with studying? Many of the learners in our cases suffered from various problems that affect their life management and ability to study. In other words, adult education alone might not alleviate their problems. Instead, they require long-lasting relationships with the right kind of professionals who have the knowledge and the capabilities to guide them towards the right kind of education at the right time. Not only learners but those who guide them, need to be better informed.

In our studied cases, the challenges in access to AE were numerous and often overlapping. As a summary from our cases the following challenges in AE provision and access to AE emerged: 1) Poor funding of the AE sector; 2) Securing learners' livelihood during studies; 3) Lack of suitable programmes for marginalised individuals (incl. special needs and disabilities); 4) Lack of language skills; 5) Lack of information (about educational options and available benefits); 6) Negative attitudes towards studying (often based on previous experiences).

2. Gender and diversity aspects tackled in the studied programmes

Gender equality and diversity seemed to be in some sense a "taken for granted" matter in the studied programmes. In our interviews, diversity and equality aspects were mainly mentioned in relation to national-level legislation and the organizations' own gender and diversity strategies. In many cases, the interviewees referred to the Non-Discrimination Act: *"The Non-Discrimination Act safeguards and promotes equality in employment and education. The Act prohibits discrimination based on age, ethnic or national origin, language, religion, belief, opinion, health, disability or sexual orientation."* The question of gender equality was rarely discussed in any detail, as it was considered something that exists by default. Yet, the educational and occupational segregation based on gender is still *de facto* state of affairs in Finland. In the prison surroundings, for example, VET provision features traditional male dominated sectors like construction, metalwork and carpentry. At the same time educational offerings for female prisoners are very limited both in terms of quantity and fields of study. Some gender-related challenges in AE mentioned by policymakers and educators were: A) the fact that many mothers with migrant backgrounds do not take part in adult (or any other) education and stay home, although they would really benefit from studying; B) there is a growing group of young men in Finland whose educational paths come to an end after comprehensive school.

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

Policymakers: According to our policymaker interviews, the Finnish education system aims at providing tools to become more active in one's own education and life. The aim of becoming an active citizen through participation in the wider society also shows in the curricula of our studied cases. Although a lot of the information policymakers have at their disposal relates to transitions to education and working life, in our interviews they still maintained that active citizenship should be considered something more than just participation in working life. At the same time, it should be noted that the precondition of active citizenship is learning the skills that enable participation and those skills are usually developed through education and work.

Practitioners: It became evident through our interviews that on the grass root level active citizenship has to be understood in the context of different life situations and conditions. In other words, there are many ways to be active and one needs to consider the capabilities and needs of the individual. For someone fresh out of prison or with a long history in different institutions, learning how to ride on the bus or learning to use internet banking are already major leaps towards APC. On the other hand, for someone who comes from a broken society controlled by a corrupted regime, learning the functions of democracy might be a priority. In general, students need experiences of participation in their studies to see that their choices and initiative have real impact.

Learners: In most of our interviews with learners, APC was linked to "living according to rules of the society". Different interviewees had different emphasis; e.g. returning to "normality" for prisoners; respecting the laws and the culture of the country of residence for migrants; gaining expected minimal qualifications for virtual school students. Many interviewees were more familiar with the concept of citizenship than active citizenship, not to mention APC, and referred to aspects of legal or state citizenship in their answers. A general tendency was to describe an active citizen as someone who is self-supported and works to earn his/her own money. Some also talked about AC/APC as being the opposite of a passive bystander; this meant for instance voting and knowing one's rights and duties, even if only vaguely.

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

We identified three elements that were of critical importance in enabling the learners to develop APC competencies and becoming active citizens. First, holistic guidance services should to be available for the students from start to finish. This includes traditional study counselling but also support with issues that are not strictly study related; e.g. housing, rehabilitation, social benefits, etc. Second, since many learners in the programmes dealt with various difficulties in their lives, multi-professional cooperation was important to tackle the problems that had led to poor educational participation. Third, learners who took part in the programmes all benefited from individual study plans and paths, in which their capabilities and life situations were taken into consideration.

GP1 VALMA case gives an example of a strong emphasis on different forms of guidance/counselling in the beginning, during and at the end of the studies, including guiding applicants to more suitable programmes when needed. Similar services in smaller measures were offered also in other GP programmes. Flexibility in the programme's implementation benefits different types of learners. They can, for instance, combine rehabilitative activities with studying. Students can also move on to study in degree programmes any time during VALMA if they are ready to do so.

GP2 VET in prison shows that in order to be able to organise VET in prison surroundings, cooperation and coordination are key elements. To set up and provide formal education to prisoners is already a demanding task but is only the beginning. Bridging different demands of the criminal sanction system with the individual needs of the prisoners is an aspect that needs a lot of attention from organisers of education. In addition, to make sure prisoners will also continue education after release, the whole path from start to finish often needs to be planned utilising a network of professionals.

GP3 The Virtual School provides virtual learning opportunities to those unable to attend basic adult education physically. The programme has been the last option for many students after everything else has failed, thus offering them a new chance to get their lives together and achieve the minimum standard of education expected in the Finnish society. The GP also conducts separate projects for students under 16, aiming to prevent dropping out from school and marginalisation at young age. The programme has put a lot of effort in creating a virtual platform and curriculum that are easy to use, motivate learning and develop the students' skills in communication, self-reflection, information retrieval and ICT. The programme aims to develop and widen to serve other vulnerable groups such as migrants with less language skills.

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

The qualifications required from adult education practitioners both in VET and basic compulsory education are described in the Decree 14.12.1998/986, which sets the formal qualifications of teachers on different education levels. In general, work in challenging surroundings with learners who are often in difficult life situations, requires diverse competences.

Different backgrounds and diversity among colleagues was seen as a strength by our interviewed educators. Educational backgrounds of the AE practitioners also vary a lot in our cases. In GP1, for example, the educators had graduated from different domains; various social or health care professions, theology, Finnish as a second language, special education etc. In GP2 most of our interviewees were qualified vocational teachers with extensive experience from their field. In GP3 where technical/ICT expertise is also expected. In general the teachers and other practitioners in AE, such as student counsellors, have formal qualifications and rather high expertise.

In addition to formal qualifications, the interview data emphasises that working as an AE practitioner in these studied GPs requires a certain type of personality above all. Positive personal traits mentioned were, humanity, ethics, empathy, sense of humour, flexibility and good communication skills. Openness to further learning and developing oneself professionally were also valued, as well as multi-professional team working skills. Need for further/updating education for teachers was recognised especially in special and multicultural pedagogy and working in prison environment.

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

On a general level, *favourable conditions* in Finland include: 1) low power distance and small population 2) mutual trust and transparency; 3) flexible education system and; 4) equal opportunities education. Many relevant officials have a background as educators and thus have understanding of the field. The national education system is based on the principles of mutual trust and transparency instead of inspections. In other words, steering the AE field is based on the norms and national framework, authorisation to provide education (by the Ministry of Education and Culture) and the funding scheme. In addition, the flexible system leaves room for local and regional AE providers. National legislation aims to e.g. prevent marginalisation of vulnerable groups through increasing access to education, avoiding dead ends and allowing studying on unemployment benefits. The APC principles are embedded in education programmes through national curricula and qualification requirements provided by law.

Unfavourable conditions are often discussed in terms of (too few) resources, and funding allocation. AE providers/municipalities are for example not required to organise basic education for adults. When resources are tight, "non-attractive" student groups might not be in the interest of the AE providers. Cutbacks in funding of education during the previous and current government have been considerable. At the same time, prison education as a whole suffers from a lack of education strategy.

Another partly unfavourable condition is the complex benefit system that does not benefit all adult students. Youth, AE providers and caseworkers are often confused about who are entitled to different benefits. Thus the benefits system can be both a positive and negative factor affecting the VYAs' access to education.

Third unfavourable condition are the complexities of the AE field when it overlaps and relates with various societal sectors. This raises a need for mediators communicating between actors, especially informing VYAs who often face difficulties in finding suitable study options. Many of the existing guidance services are aimed at certain groups only (young people, long-term unemployed etc.).

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

This part of the research focuses on the reforms that are currently underway in the educational sectors of the studied GPs. They are scrutinised from the viewpoint of addressing some of the flaws of the system that was still in place during the bulk of the research work. We looked at the new Act on Vocational Education (531/2017) and the partly revised Basic Education Act (628/1998).

The VET reform (2018) was - and is still - ongoing and the expectations of the AE providers have been mixed. The reform improved the coherence of the legal basis of various educational programmes. The revised funding system should recognise the vulnerable students and their need for support as well as increasing funding through higher compensation rates especially for prison learners. This should make vulnerable groups more appealing for organisations to provide them adult education.

In order to develop students' APC related skills, common units of general studies are implemented for youth and adult learners in VET: communication and interaction skills, mathematical-natural scientific skills, society and working life skills. The students' active role is secured legally and individualised study paths reinforced through personal competence development plans (PCDP). Some sort of individualised study plans were already utilised in all GP programmes. The students' right to personal teaching and guidance are granted in the new Act. However, it has been questioned whether the increased learning-at-work and expected independence are beneficial for the most vulnerable.

Revisions in the Basic Education Act (628/1998 §46) focus on students over the compulsory school age. The revised §46 (2018 onwards) addresses the needs of the low-educated migrant population, ensuring possibility to attend basic education combined with integration training and literacy studies. This provides an example of how emerging learning needs in of the adult population have been recognised in laws and policies. Ensuring effective implementation of the Act requires cooperation between policy makers, practitioners and other sectors (service providers, NGOs ect.) in sharing information about the vulnerable adult population's needs. This provides an example of the complexities of the AE field when it overlaps and relates with various societal sectors, thus emphasising the need for mediators and "translators" communicating between different actors.

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

The programmes have managed to utilise several teaching techniques, guidance, counselling and general communication methods to improve students' perceptions of themselves as learners. Guidance and counselling services were important in all good practices (and the programme studied in communicative ecology mapping) in informing students about their educational options. Many students in the studied programmes have difficulties in processing or accessing written materials and/or lack ICT skills, which may hinder their chances of finding information independently.

Guidance interviews in the beginning of the programmes were widely utilised, but in general the programmes did not have much resources for guidance regarding further studies. The Virtual School had the least amount of services available with the highest expectation of independence, however it offered non-stop online guidance alongside counselling services.

Despite the GP and CEM programmes being offered by particular AE providers, their practices of information access and communication also showcase the strengths and the weaknesses of cross-sectional communication. Collaboration with different services (caseworkers, social workers, work rehabilitation counsellors) help to reach out for vulnerable youth, but sometimes inaccurate information or lack of knowledge about how to e.g. combine welfare benefits with studying can hinder some individuals' access to education.

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

Internet coverage and technology usage is high in Finland, *the society relies heavily on electronic services*. This raises a concern of VYAs without access to internet/social media being at risk of falling out of social networks and information access. Even many of those with access to the devices seemed to lack the skills or motivation to search and find accurate information (related to AE) and their use of media and different information channels seemed rather narrow. Many were unsure where to even begin to search for information.

Despite "everything being on the internet", *face-to-face communication* was still crucial for finding information about matters related to education, benefits and planning for the future. Thus, the amount and the quality of (formal and informal) social relations become crucial in the VYAs' difficult life situations. Personal contact translates into feeling of being cared for. Preventing dropping out during transition times (after comprehensive school, between studies/jobs ect.) requires reaching the youth and providing accurate information at the right time through the right channels. These gaps are important for the public services and AE providers to recognise. This emphasises *the importance of cross-sectional and multiprofessional collaboration* between AE providers, other service providers and policy makers. Many of the VYAs had difficulties looking for information from various sources and keeping in contact with several institutions and service providers. "One-stop-shop" type of services can provide a solution for this.

There is a strong need to *overcome potential students' negative perceptions of school and studying* and to boost their motivation to look for options. Importance of positive word-of-mouth about study options cannot be overlooked. However, at the moment, former students were not widely utilised in advertising the programmes. There is also need for increasing resources of guidance counselling for adults.

In two GPs (excluding GP2) and the CEM case, social media and *technological solutions* played an important role in effective everyday communication between AE practitioners (teachers, counsellors) and learners. GP2's prisoners form a specific case, not being able to utilise technological devices due to security restrictions.

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

Information usage has been examined in three levels in our research (the focus here is on AE programme design):

1. National design process for AE policies & regulations
2. Cross-sectional and multiprofessional collaboration
3. AE programme design processes at organisational level

When it comes to ensuring the smooth flow of information related to learners in vulnerable situations and developing programmes to suit their needs, the importance of multi-professional teams in AE organisations was pointed out in all our researched cases. Utilising student feedback still requires developing in the studied VALMA and prison VET programmes, since it is expected in the new VET Act. It seems that a lot of "hidden development" takes place in the programmes when educators are in daily contact with their students and receive feedback through informal conversations.

At the moment, some information about potential, current or previous students is gathered and utilised, but systematically collected feedback could and should be utilised more. Currently, AE providers do not receive enough information about their new students' educational or other relevant history. The upcoming KOSKI-database could prove useful in this, as it collects information on individuals' educational paths throughout their lives. In addition to learners, also relevant officials will have access to the educational information saved in the system. Introduction of the system has the potential to improve planning and providing more individualised educational services. At the moment, in many cases it is almost impossible to do follow-ups due to privacy protection or lack of staff resources. Thus it is also difficult to utilise positive word-of-mouth systematically in advertising the programmes.

GP1: The list of official and unofficial stakeholders involved in the design process is exhaustive: Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Employment and the Economy, national steering committees, education providers and different types of student and working life organisations. Although national curriculum and legislation provide the framework for the programme, there can be much variation on local level. Information access and usage are also different on different levels. Educational providers can use their knowledge of the local operational environment in developing their programmes - within certain limits. Lack of information about other providers' offerings and unclarity of what kind of information should be collected hindered the use of information more effectively on local level especially. At the same time, officials developing the programme on national level do not receive enough information of the programme's reach and impact.

GP2: National VET curriculum and national legislation form the basis for the programme, but implementation varies and is bound to the local prison context. National-level design parties include different ministries, the Finnish National Board

of Education (FNBE) and the Criminal Sanctions Agency. At local level programme design is carried out by education providers, regional apprenticeship-training centres, public employment services and local prison supervisors and educators. Also prison security and staff, work activity supervisors, student counsellors and social workers are involved. Thus designing and planning requires a lot of cooperation. As of the 2018 VET reform, a national implementation model for prison education has been designed and will be utilised in prison education. The CSA maintains a client database system which is an important information tool, however only CSA officials have the access to it and it lacks data on the students' educational history. Also follow-up is only done by CSA due to privacy protection.

GP3: National adult basic education curriculum, local curriculum and legislations form the basis. Multiprofessional information sharing and collaboration was deemed crucial, as well as the design and the development of the virtual learning platform as a place for both utilizing and delivering information. Student data and feedback are collected through a student register platform and the learning platform, utilizing both learning and user analytics and feedback collected in various ways. These are however not yet fully utilized. The programme management also collaborates with different NGOs, organisations and other service providers in order to gather and share information about educational needs of their target groups and the possibilities to widen the programme scope.