Spain

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

AE programmes design and implementation are particularly challenging because AE demand is a) not stable and fixed, but it changes over (sometimes short periods of) time, and b) diverse in terms of participants´ socio-demographic profiles and needs. In turn, this causes difficulties in AE access due to limitations posed for both schools and participants. Limitations experienced by schools encompass

- insufficient places offered to meet an ever changing demand
- the impossibility to welcome late comers
- different criteria on access requirements

Those experienced by AE potential students encompass participants´

- difficulties to find suitable AE programmes
- limited available time due to other responsibilities (e.g. job, studies and/or family care)
- economic limitations

Some AE programmes in Barcelona offer flexible time periods to enrol (this is known as *matrícula viva)*, but others do not because AE authorities consider that late comers would miss essential content that cannot be recovered or repeated each time. GP3_ES coordinator pointed that many youths failed to enrol on time in educative programmes due to the lack of family support and difficulties to find the right programme. In AE, flexibility is a valuable resource, so GP3_ESeducators agree to exceptionally accept late comers if they can demonstrate previous knowledge on the topics covered by the programme, they are highly motivated to study on their own and able to keep up with the course contents. Otherwise, they argue, there might be too much risk of failing again in an already disenchanted population.

Regarding AE admission requirements, policy actors interviewed in Catalonia had different opinions. One of them expressed AE only has to cover people aged above 18 years. By contrast, another informant stated AE should also consider people below this age and added that age should not be the only admission criteria but that there should be other minimum requirements instead. In turn, various AE practitioners from third sector organisations observed the shortage of educational offers and resources for young people aged over 18 years old.

2. Gender and diversity aspects tackled in the studied programmes

GP educators have different -sometimes almost opposite- standpoints about gender implications in AE, echoing wider public debates on "equality versus difference" in Western feminist and ethnic studies. While some educators argue against gender specificity because "we are all human beings" (Educator, GP2_ES) and do not think special measures are needed, others recognise that gender differences influence two key aspects: participants' vocational choices and the conciliation of family and work life. The former becomes evident when in some courses there are male participants only (e.g., painter or computer repair and maintenance) or female participants only (e.g., hairdresser), echoing traditional divisions of roles often based on prejudices. The latter relates to the difficulties associated with joint study and work, especially for young mothers, who depend to a great extent on resources that support their care work, such as babysitting or courses scheduled when children are at school. Although some AE programmes take this barrier into account, fieldwork evidenced there are economic difficulties to effectively tackle it. Also, one educator remarked that although in their programme they take care of young mothers´ needs, once they enter the labour market, new difficulties arise (GP1_ES).

GP3_ES on computer repair and maintenance does not implement specific activities or strategies to attract girls, though educators are open to collaborate with other organizations that might work on gender issues. They also evidence gender sensitivity more generally, for example, they set up a mini exhibition on "Women and Science" at their building to reflect on the invisibility of female scientists and give information about former and current ones.

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

Both policy actors and AE practitioners´ references to APC are very general and dependent on their institutional location, so that no specific definition can be identified in their discourses. This evidences the elusive and context-dependent nature of a concept that almost everybody seems to embrace, but which is conceptualised in fragmented and partial ways.

The policy actors and AE practitioners interviewed agree on the importance of the APC-education link and highlight different but complementary aspects of APC. At the Barcelona city level, various initiatives encourage citizens to take part in decision making processes about their neighborhoods and city spaces, also considering the educational potential of cities, reflected by the creation of a specific department called *Barcelona Ciutat Educadora* (Barcelona Educating city).

In some cases, the conceptualisation of APC was not perceived as a main goal but as an indirect consequence of some other measure or action. By contrast, a policy actor in the area of formal educationstressed that AE is intrinsically linked to participatory citizenship. In accordance with AE educators, another policy actorhighlighted the importance of encouraging students´ participation in culture and society by promoting their knowledge of and integration in local activities and institutions.

Young people´s conceptions and practices related to APC were particularly difficult to grasp. The APC terminology was not familiar to them and the attempts to talk about their rights and ways of feeling part of society proved unfruitful in most cases. Their lack of awareness or interest in the concept of APC together with an analysis of their motivations to take part in AE suggest that young people do not relate it to APC but with a more specific, short-term goal: mainly to quickly get a job that allows them to afford their living expenses. Exceptionally, two Roma women and social activists were particularly sensitive to APC conceptualisation and practice, which they defined in terms of a more egalitarian society in which everybody could fully enjoy socio-economic and political rights without being discriminated for their ethnicity, age or gender.

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

As various AE practitioners pointed out, AE programmes often become an attractive alternative to compulsory secondary education (ESO), experienced by many young people as boring, useless, difficult or just not attractive enough. The most critical voices consider that current ESO offer has become an outdated, resourceless and failed model unable to retain students and adapt to their diversity. Some current problems include the presence of numerous students per class, overworked and stressed teachers, outdated and low-quality contents and methodologies, and insufficient material and human resources. Such working conditions prove difficult for students, educators as well as other school staff, but they constitute particularly harsh conditions for youth whose personal and socio-economic contexts placesthem in vulnerable positions.

Coordinators and educators from the three GP cases covered in Spain mention diverse strategies and criteria to re-engage young people into life projects related to vocational trainings, labour integration and/or furtherstudy. However, they agree on the importance of combining technical training with personal values education, encouraging AE participants´ personal growth, helping them to recover self-esteem and self-confidence. This is pursued through highly personalized education in which contents and methodologies are dynamic, practical, group-oriented and flexible enough as to adapt to diverse profiles and interests. Once AE participants believe in themselves, they can start feeling part of society by participating in the labour market, in local and community spaces. A GP3_ESpractitioner asserted he also encourages youth´s critical reading of political and local reality, in order to promote their citizenship engagement.

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

AE practitioners´ best considered competencies are more related to human values and personal communication skills than to technical qualifications. As one informant pointed out, this fact makes the difference between educators and mere trainers (*formadores*), who limit their work to teaching and do not actively get involved with young people´s personal wellbeing.

Educators interviewed stress that it is essential that theyare able to empower participants, supporting them to develop self-confidence and self-esteem through horizontal, empathetic and trustful relations with young people. In turn, this positively resonates in youth´s involvement in society as socially, economically and culturally integrated citizens.

Above all, fieldwork in Spain shows that educators should be able to understand participants and adapt contents and methodologies to diverse profiles, interests and contextual situations. This often means to draw on updated, dynamic and practically oriented contents and methodologies. Despite this awareness among practitioners, time constrains were often mentioned as a drawback to provide the personalized attention and supportive services required to successfully deliver APC programmes foryoung people at risk of social exclusion.

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

Favourable conditions that affect the potential of AE policies to cultivate APC for young people at risk of social exclusionencompass:

- AE grassroot origins and values, emerged from neighbours´ associations in peripheral and less favoured working-class areas. This bottom-up development that preceded all AE regulation, constitutes a living example of APC in itself, with learners choosing contents of their interest and participating in the management of their schools.
- Engaged AE practitioners, who aim to achieve excellence in AE despite difficulties and scarcity of resources, feeling passionate about their job and showing respect and empathy for young people at risk of social exclusion.
- Institutional synergies, collaborations and networking between the numerous plans, programmes and third sector organisations dedicated to vulnerable young people, AE and social inclusion in Spain. Sometimes, however,there are overlapping efforts and practical difficulties to coordinate services and budgets and set clear priorities.

Unfavourable conditions identified during fieldwork encompass:

- Limited financing, partly explained by a sharp decrease in public budget and investment in education and social policies in the aftermath of the economic crisis. The criteria to assign funding is also contested, with highly competitive subsidies and funding calls that tend to reward quick, short-term results in detriment of long-term aims and programmes.
- Political instability at both regional and national levels. Regionally, the confrontations between Spanish nationalists and Catalan pro-independence supporters have recently intensified in all fields, including education (e.g. the Catalan educational model has been accused of indoctrination and exalting the Catalan culture in opposition to Spanish references).
- At the national level, the Spanish government was involved in corruption scandals which resulted in a vote of no confidence to former Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, finally ousted from Parliament in June 2018.
- The gap between institutional and political timings, and AE participants´ everyday needs was pointed out by various informants, in reference to bureaucratic procedures and funding delays.

Critical factors encompass

- AE strong focus on employability. Current AE provision has been widely criticised for being too influenced by Lifelong Learning (LLL) theories that prioritise laboral inclusion based on individual efforts, instead of promoting community values such as solidarity and love for knowledge.
- Rigid vs. Flexible regulation of formal AE programmes. Some AE practitioners complained about an excess of regulations and lack of flexibility to adapt AE

programme requirements to a diverse population with changing needs(AE school authority, Int2, SP).

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

- *Multidimensional approach*. In post-crisis Spain, formal AE has tended to focus on the socioeconomic dimension of APC by prioritising learners´ short-term employability. However, in order to foster APC values and look after young people´s integral well-being, policies might benefit from finding a balance between the multiple and overlapping dimensions of AE -cultural, social, economic and political- as well as supporting long-term programmes. This involves respecting AE participants' diverse profiles and needs, offering high quality and personalised educational itineraries (against standardised and homogenising approaches). For example, in Barcelona the PEAI[1] programme tailors Catalan and Spanish courses to recently arrived immigrants´ needs, in order to facilitate their better integration into the broader education system.
- *Multistakeholder approach*. By creating participatory processes and rounds of consultation with diverse stakeholders (learners, practitioners and authorities), policy makers have better chances of leading successful processes in which beneficiaries can actively appropriate the changes that affect their daily lives, as exemplified by the Integral Plan for the Roma People (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2014).
- *Preventive measures*. Empirical evidence shows that it is more effective to take preventive measures to avoid students´ risk of dropping out and/or repeating before this happens, since it is more difficult to make them return to the educational system once they left it. The Youth Plan of the Orientation Service at the Barcelona Education Consortium successfully collaborates with secondary education institutes staff to detect students at risk in order to guide them in their transition to post-compulsory education, offering them alternative educational itineraries.
- *Gendered approach*. AE policies for APC should be sensitive to gender differences, in particular if they affect participants' access to AE and chances of success. By implementing compensatory measures accordingly, young women at risk of social exclusion might be able to complete their educative projects and fully enjoy APC.

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[1]PEAI stands for "ExperimentalProgrammeforwelcomingandpreparingrecentlyarrivedpersons´ integration to the educative system" (*Programa experimental de acogiday preparación para la integración al sistema educativo dereción llegados*).

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

With a few exceptions, the communication practices of the young people interviewed were mainly informal, focused on family communication and based on personal interactions and WhatsApp messages (written, voice recorded and pictures). WhatsApp is by far the favourite mobile app -"simple", "cheap", immediate. Other popular mobile apps mentioned are Instagram and Facebook.

Most informants use digital media for social networks with entertainment purposes, so their access to information is based on personal interactions with family and community members. If mediated, it is limited to TV news in a few cases or very specific and practical information searches useful for everyday issues, such as recipes, in YouTube or online portals. Some young informants said they also look for information related to their training programmes in YouTube.

In most cases analysed in Barcelona, young people's access to AE programmes was facilitated through face to face communication by mediating actors, in particular social assistants working with the Roma women or GP participants. These professionals appear as the main AE information providers for young persons who do not tend to look for AE information on their own, with a few exceptions. Thus, AE information reached young people as part of a series of measures and recommendations to help beneficiaries improve their lives more generally, by acquiring new skills and entering the labour market. AE providers and young people interviewed confirmed the central role these mediators had in youth involvement in AE. Other mediating actors mentioned during fieldwork were school counsellors who detect students who do not have a good performance in the first years of compulsory secondary education and are at risk of repeating or abandoning their studies. Various young people interviewed explained they were recommended a programme as an alternative to repeating another year in compulsory secondary education, an option which they preferred avoiding.

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

Fieldwork in Barcelona has shown that sometimes learners have reference institutions where to get information on AE programmes themselves. In most cases, though, mediators play a key role, in particular social assistants who help young people with resources to become more independent and self sufficient. In this context, AE is mainly oriented to the labour market and mediators act as labour counsellors.

Recommendations by word of mouth are highly effective, either from institutional mediators or peers, and social media often spread these messages further. Ideally, a good communication strategy to disseminate AE opportunities would mix online and offline resources.

Young people tend to prefer oral and visual communication to written one so messages could be adapted to these languages. The popularity of Instagram among the youngest informants might indicate the success of visual messages and information. AE campaigns based on pictures and images more than text, could be an effective way of attracting potential learners.

In order to reach more young people, especially those who are not within the system of social care, it is important to visit them personally at their usual places of gathering (e.g. a park, a bar, a squat house, etc.) in order to offer them alternatives. For instance, this has been done in Barcelona through so-called "street educators" and it has proved a successful way of involving more young people in AE programmes.

Regarding young people´s preferences to access information on future AE or job opportunities, answers were not uniform as to support a "one-size-fit-all" strategy; sometimes they were contradictory. Their answers ranged from preferring to actively search for information, to passively wait to receive it in their smartphones. Some interviewees said they would ask for it personally in the provider´s facilities. By contrast, other participants agreed they would like to receive information by phone call, email or WhatsApp.

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

In Catalonia, the official AE programmes are mainly designed with the inputs of schools' directors and professors. The Department of Education dedicates one section to AE: the Curricular Management Service of AE (*Servei d´ Ordenació Curricular de Educació d´Adults*). In order to elaborate and update the official AE curriculum, they rely on their own statistics elaborated according to the information provided by each AE centre and they also consider contextual statistical data such as unemployment rates and correlations with educational levels.

Barcelona province AE authorities also collect relevant information (e.g., on attendance and abandonment rates) from each AE centre and each city district every year, which is compared in order to identify changes or inconsistencies and implement improvements in the courses to be offered the following year. By streamlining information flows, important decisions can be made in relation to how to re-distribute demand and offer across districts when mismatches are detected, e.g., if a course has too many vacancies in one neighbourhood, but a waiting list in another one.