Malta

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.

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1. Challenges in AE provision and access

The case "VET for NEETs" suggests that the most important challenge is to understand all the issues affecting the society they live in. Although this is normally addressed in the course through brainstorming, they note that they find it hard to write on board in front of others or express their ideas openly. During group work students find it hard to use consensus decision-making to rank the issues that the group wants to address. In this period of decreasing opportunity, it is essential to be realistic and strategic about the persistent obstacles and challenges. These include the common bias in Maltese society that VET and AE is academically inferior, and concern that efforts to strengthen APC tend to promote a leftist political agenda and to detract from other educational priorities (i.e. skills for jobs). Further, although some students seek opportunities for civic engagement and say that they want to become community leaders, "becoming well off financially" remains a far more common motivation for incoming trainees. Many NEETs have an interest in getting civically or politically involved, but worry about anything they perceive as distracting them from meeting "purposeful" goals.

2. Gender and diversity aspects tackled in the studied programmes

NEETs population in Malta is mostly men (72%) and highly heterogeneous and seems to consist, in decreasing order, of Transition NEETs, Floating NEETs, and Core NEETs. These sub-categories could also possibly be further sub-divided into two further sub-segments, with one sub-segment demonstrating traits somewhere in between those of a Transition and Floating NEET, and second sub-segment demonstrating traits somewhere in between those of a Floating and Core NEET. The largest subgroup tends to be those who are conventionally unemployed.

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

Policymakers: APC is hardly effective at the moment because of the economic and budgetary crisis as well as the influx of migrants and refugees. It could only work if collaboration between different types of partners can pool resources and experiences and spark innovation. In addition strategic and sustainable funding could enable NGOs to focus on participatory citizenship and not on their own survival, and the use of new technology can engage more (ensuring that citizens have the competence, confidence and access to use them).

Educators: the term has an added value attached to it. APC is essentially about learning in a real life civic context, for example influencing decisions that have real consequences and influence on the lives of young people; how their school or programme is run, school or training budgets and decisions regarding their local community. This approach helps to develop self-efficacy (the belief that you can make a difference as one of them notably suggested).

Learners/Participants: A rather blunt view of the concept relating to participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterized by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy. Some of them however note that APC is only a concept used by politicians who want to be voted and that the politicians easily forget the value of APC. The only refer to it when their political position is at stake.

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

Although the course does not focus on APC per se, the most critical elements lie on the fact that the main competence that is developed during the programme is decision-making. For most trainers this competence is imperative for developing APC competence. Through discussion, trainees learn to analyse information, think critically, develop communication skills, share opinions and learn from experience. Discussions usually involve the whole group, but can also be done in smaller groups. In this case, he asks groups to share what they spoke about with the class. Discussions always take place in the safe environment of the programme where learners feel confident about expressing their ideas and opinions. This means it is important to make sure everyone has the opportunity to speak, not just the loudest or most talkative learners in the group.

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

A lot of effort has gone into the preparation of adult educators by the Ministry of Education and Development and the University of Malta. The programmes involved those currently being engaged as practitioners and prospective ones. There is a good infrastructure in place for developing adult education through vocational entities such as the Employment and Training Corporation, the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology, the University's Cottonera Resource Centre, a number of national and community broadcasting channels and the presence of a local council in each locality. The involvement of the local council in community adult education is however limited and often sporadic.

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

An unfavourable factor is the lack of a traditional adult education culture in a country which has for long restricted importance to the formal educational system mainly in the 'lock-step' fashion, that is to say the conventional pathway e.g. primary to secondary to sixth form to university or vocational institute etc. For some trainers another unfavourable factor is an over-focus on exams and formal credentialing with less prestige attached to non-formal ways of learning and/or VET. There might be remedies available in this regard through the National Qualifications Framework, but it remains to be seen whether prestigious institutions such as the University of Malta, to give one example, would recognise outcomes of this type of assessment for the purpose of enrolments in their diploma and degree courses.

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

The major policy framework is provided by the National Lifelong Learning (LLL) Strategy. It was placed in the public domain for consultation following which it has been adopted, as of December 2014, as the document providing the main policy guidelines.

The National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (LLL) document outlines targets to be reached. It deals with lifelong learning in a holistic manner taking account of the larger social domains of learning not just within the 20-34 age period, but even beyond into older adulthood. It also conceives of LLL in a manner that contributes to sustainable development, in keeping with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It promotes the view that there is more to lifelong learning than simply employability. However a strategy has been proposed to improve the skill levels of persons. It includes[1]:

- Assessing VET systems to ensure a learning outcomes approach; raising public awareness of a linkage between an improvement in individual skills sets and enhanced workplace flexibility;
- Developing programmes stimulating a demand for learning associated with skill sets relevant to the labour market, those experiencing strong demands for skills at work being more likely to be interested in their continuing education and training; promoting re-skilling and up-skilling with a focus on low skilled;
- Integrating formal learning with informal learning at the workplace;
- Reducing training costs through financial incentives such as the provision of subsidies and tax concessions to small firms and existing workers;
- Facilitating courses intended towards a transition from agriculture, industry and service to a Knowledge Based Economy (KBE) and Knowledge Based Society (KBS), moving from a hyper-local to a global context.

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[1] MT_GP1_Pol1_F_061217 own opinion

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

Access to the programme is easily made through the relevant platform. An online application is available. This is the only way to apply for the programme. Any other communication is either by phone or e-mail but only with the secretary.

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

The programme sustains an e-learning platform and all communication takes place from within the platform. The platform is moodle based and all the relevant material, questions, messages etc. appear in the platform for all participants to have access to them.

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

The design involves the following accessed information:
- Job descriptions.
- Existing curricula that have been developed within the organization in the past.
- Educational material from the University of Malta.
- Relevant literature.
- Evaluation reports of similar programmes and courses in other EU countries.
- Relevant EU funded projects (e.g. ERASMUS+ KA2, LLP projects, etc.).

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