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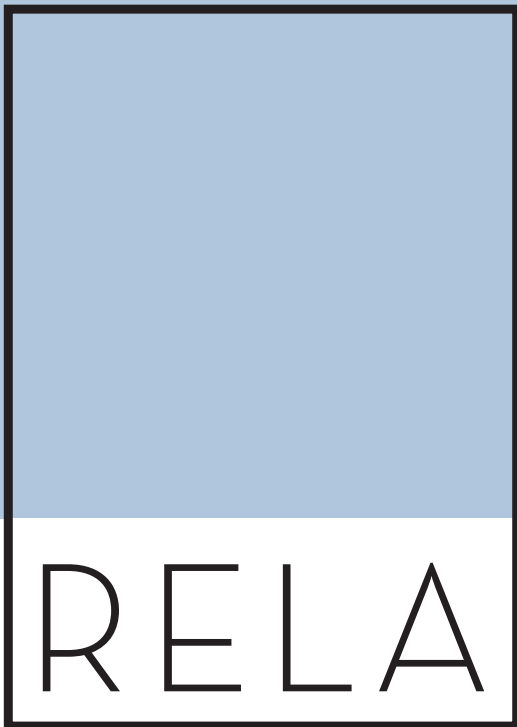
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Setting the new European agenda for adult learning 2021-2030: Political mobilisation and the influence of advocacy coalitions

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Abstract

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, international organisations and governments have issued mitigation policies, and (re)oriented broader policy strategies to respond to new problematisations about the future. In this context, the education ministers of the European Union (EU) adopted a Council Resolution on a new European agenda for adult learning 2021-2030. Drawing on the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), this paper examines the political mobilisation and agenda setting behind this Resolution through network ethnography and the analysis of belief systems. The findings point at an increased social dialogue, favoured by an 'uncommon' way – as by our informants – through which the Slovenian Ministry of Education pursued the agreed priority at EU level, while holding the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU. While visibility of adult learning rose under COVID-19, advocacy coalitions formed at national (Slovenian) and European level facilitated stronger alignment in agenda setting among different actors towards a holistic approach that calls for inter-sectorial and multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Keywords: adult learning, agenda setting, advocacy coalition framework, belief system, European Union

Introduction

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, an 'exogenous shock' (Sabatier & Weible, 2007) to both European and national political systems, the work of international organisations and their member states has been concerned with mitigating its detrimental effects. Suitably, policy agendas and strategies have been (re)oriented to respond to new problematisations about the future of education (Robertson, 2022; Zancajo et al., 2022). In this socio-political context, overcoming the uncertainty on whether a European agenda on adult learning would be continued, the EU education ministers adopted a *Council Resolution on a new European agenda for adult learning 2021-2030* (hereafter 2021 Agenda) (Council of the European Union [CEU], 2021), under the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU). The agenda underlines that '[a]dult learning needs a *holistic approach* including *inter-sectorial and multi-stakeholder collaboration*, and effective coordination at European, national, regional and local levels' (CEU, 2021, p. 8, our emphasis). When compared to the previous Council's agenda from 2011, important changes are to be noted. If a decade ago (targeted) adult learning was believed to potentially support economic and social progress, by 2021 the learning of adults is conceived as a lifelong endeavour for the whole population in support of resilient and sustainable communities, and digital and green transitions, thus the adoption of a "holistic approach" is now seen as the way forward. Accordingly, the mechanisms foreseen to implement a communitarian agenda on adult learning have developed to include a whole-of-government approach and higher emphasis on data, monitoring, and evidence-based policy (Milana & Mikulec, 2022).

While these changes reflect to some extent adaption to broader socio-political circumstances and new EU strategic priorities, they are also the results of the political mobilisation – political action undertaken to express oneself and achieve political aims – by a plurality of actors with an interest in adult learning, and their belief systems. In fact, notwithstanding a clear-cut separation of powers among EU institutions is hard to establish, the Council of the EU represents 'a kind of bicameral parliament' (Costa & Brack, 2019, p. 116) (with the European Parliament). Yet, EU institutions, like member states, are neither monolithic nor fully independent actors (Milana, 2023). So, resolutions by the Council of the EU are influenced by the policy priorities of the countries holding its rotating Presidency, and of many actors that mobilise under the auspices of EU institutions (Krick & Gornitzka, 2019; Milana, Klatt, & Tronca, 2020; Milana, Tronca & Klatt, 2020).

Against this background, this paper examines the political mobilisation of actors and their contributions (in terms of belief systems) to influence the 2021 Agenda setting.

In the next section we introduce the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), a theory of the policy process that centres attention on actors and how they form coalitions, based on their belief systems, to have better chances to influence policy-making. Next, we illustrate our methodology, which combines network ethnography (Hogan, 2016; Howard, 2002) with the analysis of actors' belief systems (Sabatier & Weible, 2007). We then present our results. In brief they point at an increased social dialogue favoured by what our informants consider an 'uncommon' way through which the Slovenian Ministry of Education (MESS) pursued the priority agreed at EU level, while holding the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU. While visibility of adult learning rose under COVID-19, the formation of three advocacy coalitions – one at national (Slovenian) and two at European level – facilitated stronger alignments in agenda setting towards a holistic approach in adult learning that calls for inter-sectorial and multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Theoretical framework

ACF assumes that policymaking is complex, thus policy actors need to specialise in some areas to be influential, areas that, characterised by a substantive and a territorial dimension, form *policy subsystems* (Sabatier & Weible, 2007). Albeit policy subsystems might be difficult to delimit, for instance in areas of multiple level governance (local, national, international), participants to a policy subsystem have strong beliefs they want to translate into actual policy, thus they may distance themselves from others or form *advocacy coalitions* based on their beliefs. Beliefs, according to ACF, can be of three hierarchical types: *deep core beliefs* 'involve very general normative and ontological assumptions' (Sabatier & Weible, 2007, p. 194); *policy core beliefs* are priority of different policy-related values, etc. within a policy subsystem; and *secondary beliefs* are narrower in scope and easier to bring about agreement. Accordingly, in a policy subsystem actors have stronger chances to influence decision-making processes when they ally and work together with other actors with whom they share policy core beliefs.

ACF also contends that over time there might be long term changes in the belief system of specific coalition members (i.e., *policy-oriented learning*), as well as minor or major *policy changes* caused by exogenous and internal shocks (Weible & Nohrstedt, 2012). Different theories concur that shocks or perturbations to a political system, like changes in socioeconomic conditions or disasters, can bring about policy change (cf. Kingdon, 2014; Birkland, 2005); however, ACF distinguishes among an internal shock that occurs within a policy subsystem that 'directly questions policy core beliefs of the dominant coalition' (Sabatier & Weible, 2007, p. 205), and exogenous shocks of a general nature that can bring about a re-distribution of resources, of dominant political coalitions, and in policy core beliefs (Weible & Nohrstedt, 2012). As some studies recently showed the COVID-19 pandemic, an exogenous shock, and its crisis narrative, has the potential to transform education systems and bring policy change (e.g., Morris et al., 2022; Zancajo et al., 2022).

In the adult learning sector, as Milana and Klatt (2019) argue, political authority escalated from the European Commission (EC) to the Council of the EU when it approved its first ever Resolution on adult learning back in 2011 (CEU, 2011). So, adult learning assumed new contours as a policy subsystem at EU level, including different actors (officials and staff from governing and administrative bodies at EU and national levels, civil society organisations, etc.), each with strong beliefs on adult learning they want to translate into actual policy. Fittingly, for this study, the COVID-19 pandemic represents an exogenous shock to the EU adult learning subsystem, and we are interested in the actors involved in producing the 2021 Agenda, and the advocacy coalitions they formed to have better chances to influence the 2021 Agenda. For our scope, deep core beliefs are normative assumptions on adult learning (e.g., adult learning helps societal development); policy core beliefs deal with both policy scopes (e.g., people's up-skilling) and problems (e.g., low adult participation in learning provision); and secondary beliefs relate to policy implementation (e.g., coordination of actions) and instruments (e.g., EU funds).

Methodology

Political mobilisation leading to the 2021 Agenda was initiated, under the coordination of MESS before the country's Presidency of the Council of the EU (July-December 2021). To examine this process, we followed the policy (Ball, 2016; McCann & Ward, 2012), guided by four research questions:

RQ1: How did policy mobilisation evolve?
RQ2: Which actors were involved? And who was central?
RQ3: What has been the contribution (in terms of belief systems) of central actors to influence the 2021 Agenda setting?
RQ4: What advocacy coalitions were formed?

Methodologically, we first engaged with a soft version of network ethnography (Hogan, 2016; Howard, 2002). We made Internet searches, complemented by covert research (Milana, 2021) to gain information on documents and events that were not publicised, and on lists of participants to different events, which allowed a comprehensive reconstruction of what happened, when, and who was involved. Building on both public and sensitive data, we created a network view of the adult learning subsystem, by use of the Gephi software, encompassing collective actors partaking in consultation events (see next section), then restricted attention on eleven of them (Table 1).

Table 1. Overview of selected organisations

Organisation	Type of organisation	Acronym
Slovenian Ministry of Education, Science and Sport	Slovenian institution	MESS
Slovenian Institute for Adult Education	Slovenian institution	SIAE
European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training	European agency	CEDEFOP
European Training Foundation	European agency	ETF
Lifelong Learning Platform	EU-wide organization	LLLP
European Association for the Education of Adults	EU-wide organization	EAEA
European Basic Skills Network	EU-wide organization	EBSN
European Trade Union Confederation	EU-wide organization	ETUC
Interest Group on Lifelong Learning	EU-wide interest group	IGLL
European Economic and Social Committee	EU advisory body	EESC
Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion	EU institution	DG-EMPL

Next we explored the belief systems and actors' relations of the above organisations through additional Internet searches; 35 official documents (30 manifestos, position papers, and agendas related to adult learning and/or skills, produced between 2020 and 2021, and 5 outcome documents of the process behind the 2021 Agenda), and 12 expert interviews from 8 organisations (Table 2). All interviews, conducted in May-June 2022, lasted approximately 1 hour, were held in English and transcribed. Unfortunately, in 3 cases (i.e., IGLL, ETUC, EESC) the identified experts were either unavailable or difficult to reach, so we relied on written documents only.

Table 2. Expert interviews

Corporate actor	Interview code
MESS	I-1
SIAE	I-2
CEDEFOP	I-3; I-4
ETF	I-5; I-6
LLLP	I-7
EAEA	I-8; I-9; I-10
EBSN	I-11
EC DG-EMPL	I-12

Finally, adapting the methodology applied by Markard et al. (2016), we performed a two-step qualitative content analysis through coding (Saldaña, 2009). First, for each organisation, we coded selected documents and interview transcripts based on a deductive coding scheme (Table 3); then, we returned on the coded material to refine our analysis within each code through an inductive approach (Thomas, 2006). First, we identified, for each organisation, its deep core, policy core and secondary beliefs, which were ranked based on the number of extracts assigned to each code; then we contrasted and compared the results across organisations to identify the formation of advocacy coalitions, based on shared beliefs.

Table 3. Deductive coding scheme (our adaptation from Markard et al., 2016)

Code	Sub-code
Actor (A)	Specific actors (e.g., Council of the EU)
Actors' beliefs (AB)	1) Deep core 2) Policy core 3) Secondary aspects
Actors' relations (AR)	1) Actors 2) Situation (e.g., event) 3) Artefacts (e.g., document)

The following sections report the results of our analysis.

Political mobilisation and actors involved in producing the 2021 Agenda

Under the Slovenian Presidency of the EU, preparation of the 2021 Agenda was under the responsibility of MESS. Figure 1 summarises its evolution between December 2020 and November 2021.

Figure 1. The process behind the 2021 Adult Learning Agenda
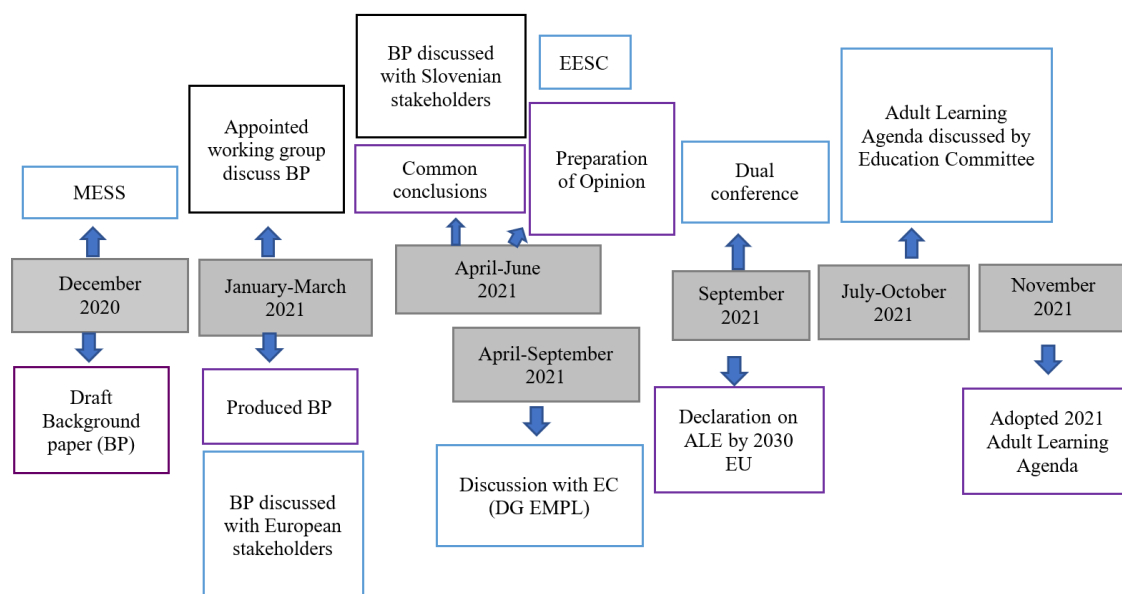
Legend:
Black lines identify nationally-based events. Light blue lines identify organisations and events at EU level (MESS in this process was representing the EU Presidency). Purple lines identify the key policy document produced along the process.

MESS comprises, among others, the Sector for Adult Education, which mission is 'to provide access to learning opportunities for as many adults as possible and to encourage their participation in educational and support activities' (MESS, 2022, our translation). In December 2020 the Sector's staff drafted a Background paper, then discussed in an online meeting (January 18-19, 2021) with an appointed working group comprising staff from two more MESS' Sectors, SIAE, a national research and development institution (IRSVET), the national agency for EU education programs (CMEPIUS), and the Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels, thus including the national representative (since 2010) in the ET 2020 Working Group on Adult Learning, who acted also as National Coordinator of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)' Skills strategy in Slovenia (2015-2018), and as National Coordinator for the Implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning.

A first outcome document, the *European Agenda for Adult Learning - Background paper for discussion* (MIZŠ, 2021a), was produced, drawing extensively on previous work carried out at EU level to which several collective actors contributed, particularly the ET 2020 Working Group on Adult Learning (2018-2020), the Council of the EU, and the EC.

The document was then put up for discussion with European stakeholders (24 March 2021) and Slovenian stakeholders (15 April 2021). European stakeholders included five Europe-wide organizations (European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning, EBSN, EAEA, ETUC, LLLP), one interest group (IGLL), two European agencies (ETF, CEDEFOP), the Network of adult learning national coordinators (appointed by member states, and coordinated by the EC), and the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL). Slovenian stakeholders included the Government Office for European Cohesion Policy, the Expert Council for Adult Education, seven ministries, SIAE and three more public institutions, three university's faculties of education, four adult education providers, and two civil society organisations.

The results of both stakeholder consultations led to a second outcome document: *Common conclusions: Meeting with stakeholders on future adult learning policies* (MIZŠ, 2021b).

On this ground, MESS held several consultations at European level with the other two countries of its Presidency group (Germany and Portugal) (dates unknown), EAEA (periodically over January-October) (EAEA I-8; I-9), EC (periodically over April-September 2021) (DG-EMPL, I-12), and EESC (periodically over April-June 2021), whose formal opinion on adult learning, upon MESS' request, was adopted on 8 July 2021 (EESC, 2021), constituting a third outcome document – or 'the voice of employers' (MESS I-1).

Moreover, on 8-9 September 2021 MESS hosted on online dual conference: *Adult Learning and Education – The Resilient Response to Future Challenges*, co-organised with UIL as also part of the preparation to the VII International Conference on Adult Education 'to identify forward-looking recommendations with a focus on ALE [adult learning and education] as *the resilient response to future challenges*' (Valentini, 2021, para. 1, emphasis in original). Overall, 430 participants attended the conference, including high representatives from European and Slovenian institutions. The results of this conference led to a fourth outcome document, the *Declaration on Adult Learning and Education by 2030 in the European Union* (2021), a commitment and advocacy paper representing 'the voice of professionals' (MESS I-1).

Finally, over July-October a draft of the 2021 Agenda was discussed five times at meetings of the Education Committee, which prepares items for discussion by EU education ministers, and each time revised by the Slovenian appointed working group. This process was completed on 27 October, after which the EC Secretariat finalised the 2021 Agenda or 'the voice of decision makers' (MESS I-1) adopted by the Council of Ministers for Education on 29 November (MESS I-1; SIAE I-2).

Two-hundreds-and-twenty-nine organisations participated in events during the above-described process (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Organisations involved in consultation events
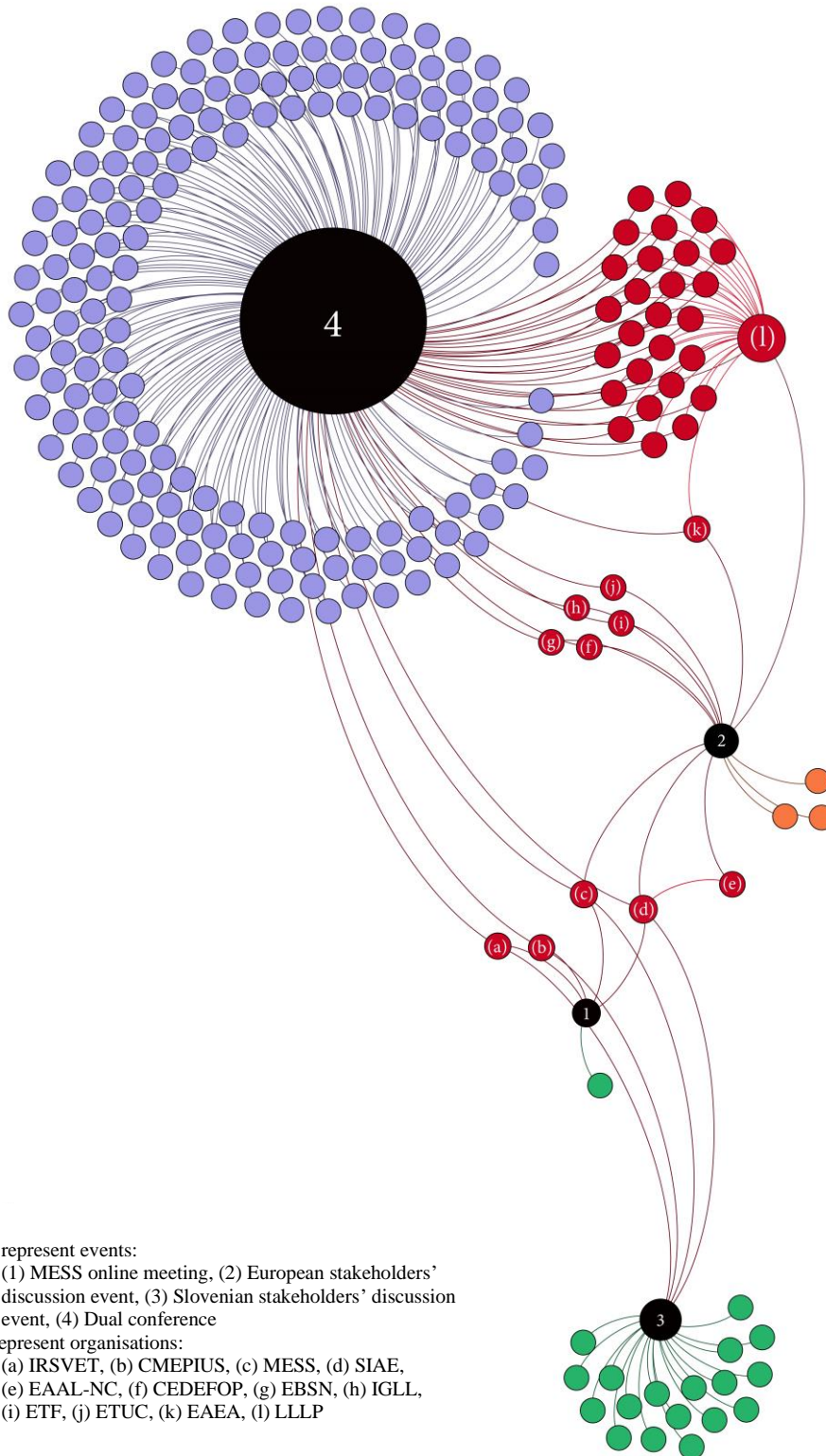
Legend:
Number represent events:
      (1) MESS online meeting, (2) European stakeholders'
      discussion event, (3) Slovenian stakeholders' discussion
      event, (4) Dual conference
Letters represent organisations:
      (a) IRSVET, (b) CMEPIUS, (c) MESS, (d) SIAE,
      (e) EAAL-NC, (f) CEDEFOP, (g) EBSN, (h) IGLL,
      (i) ETF, (j) ETUC, (k) EAEA, (l) LLLP

Among the actors shown in Figure 2, only twelve participated in two or more consultative events (Figure 3)[1]: two Slovenian institutions, the Network of adult learning national coordinators, an EU advisory group, an EC department, two European agencies, four EU-wide organizations and one interest group.

Figure 3. Actors' relations and coalitions

Legend: The use of different colours for boxes reflects the like/unlike typology of actors, while red lines indicate coalitions among actors.
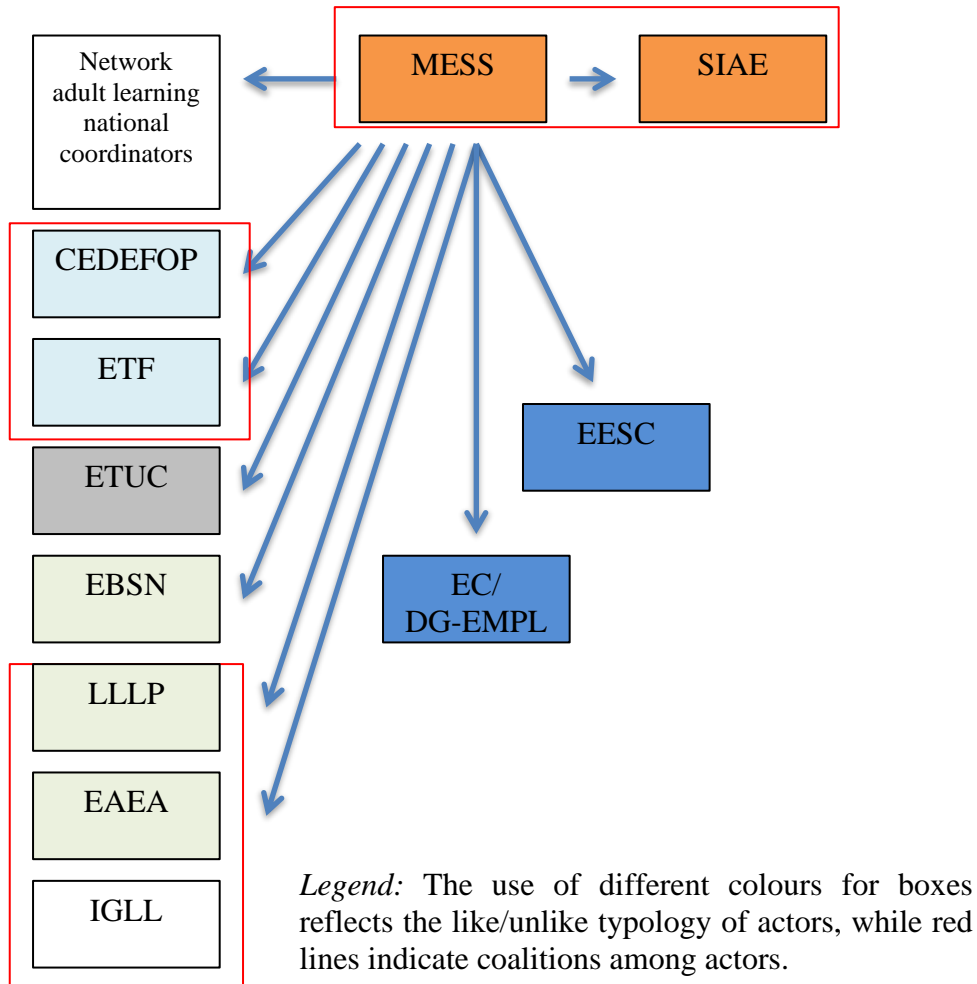
In the following sections we consider ten of them, the advocacy coalitions they formed, and their contribution in terms of belief systems. The Network of adult learning national coordinators is not considered because a Commission Expert Group does not speak with one voice, whereas DG-EMPL is not considered for insufficient data.

Slovenian institutions and advocacy coalition #1

Based on their shared beliefs, as by our analysis, a first coalition was found at national level among the two institutions that hold formal responsibility for adult learning as part of the Slovenian education system: MESS and SIAE. MESS is responsible for all levels of national education and devoted to a basic principle of lifelong learning and learning for all in the public interest. Overseeing the overall process, it played a central role in the development of the 2021 Agenda. SIAE is the central public institute and umbrella institution for adult education in Slovenia. Since 2012 it acts as the national coordinator of the European Agenda for Adult Learning, and it is thus a member of the Network of

adult learning national coordinators. Moreover, it holds close international collaboration, among others, with EAEA (I-9) and EBSN (I-11).

The two institutions are closely interrelated. While MESS is responsible for the drafting, evaluation, analysis, and implementation of regulations for all levels of education, SIAE is one of its research and development institutions providing expertise for adult education. Although some differences exist in their belief system - as highlighted in the text below, Table 4 shows their shared beliefs.

Table 4. Beliefs of coalition #1 (Slovenian institutions)

	MESS and SIAE
Deep core	(1) Helping economic and social development (2) Benefitting all (people and societies) (3) A lifelong endeavour
Policy core	(1) Increase quality, flexibility, and accessibility (2) Need for holistic approach (multi-governance, multi-stakeholder, multi-level and multi-purposes) (3) Need for improved outreach and guidance
Secondary aspects	(1) Development of flexible pathways (2) Enhance professionalisation (3) Enhance work-based learning (4) Development of quality assurance system (5) Emphasis on funding (6) Enhance digitalisation

As seen from Table 4, MESS and SIAE' *deep-core beliefs* are that adult learning is helping economic and social development (e.g., productivity, green and digital transitions, social inclusion), is a key force in making lifelong learning and mobility a reality, a lifelong endeavour, a norm that adults need to update their knowledge to meet labour market needs and societal challenges (MIZŠ, 2021a). Their *policy core beliefs* points at the challenges of better quality in provision and professionalisation of adult educators, more flexibility of learning pathways, and higher recognition of prior learning (RPL). Due to the fragmentation of adult learning, two aspects are emphasised: 1) the need for an holistic approach that encompasses multi-governance approach, multi-stakeholders and multi-level (from central to local authorities) cooperation, and 2) a multi-purpose approach based on 'skills for life' (MESS I-1, SIAE I-2) to 'balance adult learning for training and education for work […] [and] adult learning for personal growth, and coexistence in communities, including democratic citizenship' (SIAE I-2). Interview data also point at some differences between the two organisations, as 'sustainable and constant financing' (MESS I-1) is recognised as a greater challenge by MESS, while taking 'into account [of] the economistic, but also humanist point of view' of adult learning is a central concern for SIAE. In the domain of *secondary beliefs,* implementation measures and instruments to be used include flexible pathways based on individual learner autonomy and responsibility, a learning outcome-based approach, individual learning accounts, competence-based teaching and learning approaches (to enhance the professionalisation of adult educators), work-based learning (to stimulate lower qualified employees to join up-skilling and reskilling programmes), a quality assurance system based on mobility for learners, teachers and staff, a mix of European funds and costs sharing between the individual, the employer and the state, and the use of digital tools.

Both institutions share that COVID-19 pandemic caused 'initial shock' (SIAE I-2) to adult learning providers, as many non-formal programmes and activities stopped or heavily decreased, and to adult learners, especially the most vulnerable, 'because they didn't have any kind of chances to be involved in any kind of learning activities' (MESS I-1). Despite this, they also stressed the quick adaptability of adult learning providers in finding new solutions, becoming 'very inventive' (SIEA I-2) in engaging adults in learning activities through different digital tools and platforms, and 'that we all made a huge leap as far as digital skills are concerned […] nowadays, many, many people know how to use certain tools, which would not have been the case if there wasn't COVID-19' (SIAE I-2).

In short, coalition #1 advocates for adult learning being a lifelong endeavour benefitting individuals and society, thus for the need of a holistic approach that is multi-governance, multi-stakeholder, multi-level and multi-purposes.

European agencies and advocacy coalition #2

A second coalition was found at European level among the two agencies that hold responsibility for vocational education and training: CEDEFOP and ETF.

CEDEFOP promotes and supports the development and implementation of EU' vocational education and training (VET) policies, together with skills and qualifications policies, in close cooperation with the EC, member states and social partners. In recent years green skills, digitalisation, artificial intelligence, and skills forecasting 'gradually have become key strands of the Agency's work' (CEDEFOP, 2022). By contrast ETF supports education, training, and labour market reforms in transition and developing countries, and 'help[s] them to improve social cohesion and achieve more sustainable economic growth, which in turn benefits Member States and their citizens by improving economic relations' (ETF, 2022). ETF supports growing awareness on lifelong learning, work-based learning and lifelong career guidance and, after COVID-19, digital skills. Like CEDEFOP, ETF supports the EC and collaborates closely with Eurofound and CEDEFOP (ETF I-5).

As shown in Table 5 (next page), CEDFOP's *deep-core belief* is that VET has a key role in economic and social recovery and to green and digital transitions (CEDEFOP, 2020a, 2020b). In the domain of *policy core beliefs*, adult learning and continuing VET are seen to support personal and professional development (e.g., reduce unemployment, increase income), while there are clear needs for: 1) establishing well-functioning continuing VET systems accessible to all, as 'you can see that real systems of continuing and adult learning are not in place, basically, in almost every country, you don't have a real system' (CEDEFOP I-3); 2) strengthening high-quality guidance policies to reach out groups at risk; 3) establishing skills intelligence for responsive VET and green and digital transformation; 4) promoting a multi-stakeholder approach; 5) investing in digital basic skills, as the lack of digital skills is particularly high among adults while these skills 'become a precondition for most of the people to be able to remain active in the labour market' (CEDEFOP I-3; CEDEFOP, 2020a, 2020c, 2021). In the domain of *secondary beliefs*, implementation measures and instruments to be used include effective continuing VET systems based on institutional and governance arrangements, work-based learning and online learning arrangements, flexible guidance approaches based on qualification frameworks and validation arrangements, EU instruments and frameworks (e.g. individual learning accounts, micro-credentials), multi-stakeholder cooperation, and policy coordination to ensure a 'coordinated, coherent, integrated approach' (CEDEFOP I-4; CEDEFOP, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c).

Table 5. Beliefs of coalition #2 (EU-agencies)

	CEDEFOP	**ETF**
Deep core	(1) Helping economic, social recovery and transition	(1) Enabling green and digital transition (2) Career guidance benefits individuals, societies and economies
Policy core	(1) Need to establish well-functioning continuing VET systems (2) Need to strengthen high-quality guidance policies (3) Need for skills intelligence for green and digital transformation (4) Poor participation and need for up-skilling and reskilling (5) Need to promote a multi-stakeholder approach (6) Need to invest in digital basic skills	(1) Need to establish effective lifelong learning systems (2) Guidance enables reskilling, up-skilling and mobility (3) Poor participation in lifelong learning and flexibility of education and training systems (4) Need to promote a multi-stakeholder approach
Secondary aspects	(1) Development of effective continuing VET systems (2) Development of flexible guidance approaches (3) Emphasis on funding (4) Emphasis on EU instruments and frameworks (5) Emphasis on work-related learning (6) Greater multi-stakeholder's cooperation and policy coordination	(1) Development of lifelong learning systems (2) Development of career guidance systems (3) Greater international cooperation and partnership

ETF's *deep-core beliefs* are that learning and skills enable green and digital transition, while career guidance benefits individuals (to reach their potential), societies (to become fairer) and economies (to increase their efficiency) (ETF, 2021; ETF et al., 2021). Due to the poor participation of adults in lifelong learning and poor flexibility of education and training systems to meet learning needs, in the domain of *policy core beliefs*, ETF sees a need to establish effective lifelong learning systems (with flexible and individualised pathways, learning in different settings, and RPL) and promote a multi-stakeholder approach based on 'a shared vision, a shared policy, [a] shared culture, [and a] shared understanding' (ETF I-5). In the domain of *secondary beliefs*, implementation measures to be used are related to the development of lifelong learning systems (e.g., a learner-centred approach, visibility of people's skills and learning outcomes) and career guidance systems (e.g., qualified practitioners, quality tools, timely labour market information, clear standards) as well as greater international cooperation and partnership through data sharing, peer learning activities and global networking.

As mentioned, CEDEFOP and ETF closely collaborate with each other. At the dual conference, the CEDEFOP Executive Director raised attention on a join discussion paper,

The importance of being vocational (CEDEFOP & ETF, 2020), which *deep-core belief* is that in time of economic crisis, continuing VET is crucial for transition to a green and digital society. Thus, the *policy core beliefs* deal with the need to establishing a well-functioning continuing VET system, which 'remains the missing piece of integrated lifelong learning systems' (p. 12), while *secondary beliefs* focus on flexible and efficient participation pathways, multi-stakeholder cooperation and policy coordination.

CEDEFOP and ETF share that COVID-19 pandemic has affected all areas of society and economy, learning and work being no exception, and that the pandemic will 'accelerate societal and economic changes' (CEDEFOP & ETF, 2020, p. 8) and 'bring in its wake a deep, global recession' (p. 5). But, while ETF interviewees noted that in many countries 'training programs were simply suspended' and the pandemic caused 'huge education losses' (ETF I-6), CEDEFOP's interviewees emphasised 'a huge increase in the demand of learning by people' following the pandemic, although labour market restructuring had no real impact 'on the way adult learning and continuous training is organised' (CEDEFOP I-3).

In summary, coalition #2 advocates for adult learning enabling societal transitions, for more effective and well-functioning lifelong learning systems, yet with an emphasis on vocational skills, and for a multi-stakeholder approach.

European civil society organisations, interest groups and advocacy coalition #3

Still at European level, a third coalition is found among two civil society organisations and an interest group concerned with adult education and lifelong learning: EAEA, LLLP, and IGLL.

EAEA is an umbrella organisation of non-formal adult education institutions that lobby and do advocacy work to promote 'adult learning and access to and participation in non-formal adult education for all' (EAEA, 2022). It cooperates with EU institutions, national and regional governments, non-governmental organisations, and international organisations like UIL. Since 2016 it has been a member of the ET 2020 Working Groups on Adult Learning, and on Citizenship Education (now Working Group on Equality and Values in Education and Training). By contrast, LLLP is a platform of European organisations in the field of education, training and youth promoting the dialogue between civil society and public authorities. It claims a 'holistic vision of lifelong learning' and that 'the objectives of education and training should not only be described in terms of employability or economic growth but also as a framework for personal development' (LLLP, 2022). It has working groups on relevant policy areas and topics (e.g., digital learning). Finally, IGLL brings together civil society organisations with twelve members of the European Parliament to discuss key issues connected to lifelong learning. It promotes participation in adult learning and education, and inclusion through lifelong learning, with a view to the headline targets and objectives of the European Education Area.

Despite their different objectives a strong tie exists among EAEA, LLLP and IGLL. EAEA is a member of LLLP, currently represented in its Steering Committee, while EAEA Secretary-General (since 2007) held a mandate (2018-2019) as LLLP President. EAEA gained inspiration from LLLP to set up working groups, and in the use of policy statements and dissemination through the websites (EAEA I-10), which have come to resemble each other. Occasionally, on topics of common concern (e.g., digitalisation), each organisation's policy statement recalls that of the other, like in the 2020 LLLP Statement on COVID-19 pandemic, stressing the need to up-skill teachers, educators, and

trainers, and invest massively on education and training and in digital skills. IGLL started off in 2015 upon the initiative of LLLP, EAEA and several members of the European Parliament.

Table 6. Beliefs of coalition #3 (EU-civil society organisations and interest group)

	EAEA	**LLLP**	**IGLL**
Deep core	(1) Making people active, responsible and engaged citizens (2) Helping people's personal development and social inclusion	(1) Has a transformative capacity (personal, social and economic) (2) Making people active and engage citizens	(1) Being comprehensive and trans-sectorial
Policy core	(1) Poor recognition of non-formal and community learning (2) Poor recognition of adult learning's multiple positive effects and benefits (3) Need for a holistic approach (inter-sectorial, multi-stakeholder, multi-level) (4) Need for more and more stable funding (5) Need to leave no one behind (guarantee access to all)	(1) Need for a holistic approach (inter-sectorial, multi-stakeholder, multi-level) (2) Need for a rights-based approach (3) Poor recognition of non-formal and informal education and community learning (4) Poor participation	(1) Lack of access to quality education for adults and seniors (2) Need for a holistic approach (inter-sectorial, multi-stakeholder, multi-level) (3) Poor attention to non-formal and informal learning (4) More flexible learning pathways (5) Need for a rights-based approach
Secondary aspects	(1) Greater recsognition of adult education as a sector of its own (2) Development of adequate funding schemes (3) Emphasis on outreach programmes (4) Greater advocacy work (national, international)	(1) Emphasis on (EU, national) funding (2) Greater policy coherence and alignment (3) Enhance professional development (teachers and educators) (4) Development of RPL arrangements	(1) Greater dialogue with civil society and social partners (2) Emphasis on fundings (national, European)

EAEA's *deep core belief*, as seen in Table 6, is that adult learning provides people with the multiple abilities they need to work, socialise, stay healthy, and contribute to their well-being and that of others, and society at large (EAEA, 2019; EAEA I-8). So, especially at times of crisis and in transition periods, it can bring important benefits to individuals and society (EAEA I-9). In the domain of *policy core beliefs*, however, EAEA sees persistent problems. One is a narrow focus on adult learning for work and basic skills

that dismisses other benefits, especially of non-formal and community learning (e.g., skills for life) (EAEA, 2020a, 2020b; EAEA I-8). Another is that adult learning does not receive adequate and stable public funding (EAEA, 2020a, 2021a): 'What we witnessed is something like what I call the projectisation of ALE [adult learning and education], a parallel with the decline in long term funding of organisations and structures' (EAEA I-9). This does not guarantee access to all, especially marginalised groups, and senior citizens, so that no 'one is left behind' (EAEA I-9). Accordingly, 'a holistic approach as well as inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral cooperation' is needed (EAEA, 2021b). In the domain of *secondary beliefs* adult learning should gain formal recognition as one sector of national education systems, with dedicated policies, including the continuation of a committed European agenda (EAEA, 2020a, 2021b). But project-based funding shall be replaced by more stable funding schemes, and outreach programmes be diversified (so to increase participation). So greater advocacy work at all levels is needed (EAEA I-8).

LLLP's *core belief* (Table 6) is that lifelong learning has a transformative capacity in reaching goals at individual level (personal fulfilment, well-being), social level (active citizenship, social inclusion, democracy), and economic level (green, digital, post-COVID-19 transitions in the labour market) and builds citizens' capacity to be active agents of change in societal transitions (e.g., digital and sustainable transitions) (LLLP, 2020a, 2020b, 2021a). Due to the prevailing 'economic orientated discourse' (LLLP, 2021a, p. 2) in education and because 'adult education is more important than just [learning] for employability' (LLLP I-7), in the domain of *policy core beliefs* (LLLP, 2020a, 2021a, 2021c) the need for a more balanced and a 'holistic view from cradle to grave on lifelong learning' (LLLP I-7) are emphasised, encompassing multi-governance, multi-stakeholders (including civil society organisations) and multi-level (from European to local level) approaches, and a multi-purpose approach based on life skills (beyond retirement age). Due to the low participation rates of adults in lifelong learning and poor recognition of non-formal and informal education and community learning at the grass root level 'we believe that individuals should have the full ownership of their educational rights' (LLLP I-7). In the domain of *secondary beliefs*, the use of EU funds (to improve systems and provisions in all sectors of education - formal, non-formal and informal), and the financing of civil society organisations are underlined, as well as investment in adult learning as part of national education systems. Beside developing RPL arrangements that consider all types of learning, and enhancing constant professional development of teachers and educators, LLLP believes in greater policy coherence between different EU policies (e.g., RPL and micro-credentials), and alignment with international agendas (e.g., UN sustainable development goals, International Labour Organization's recognition of a universal entitlement to lifelong learning) (LLLP, 2020a, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c).

IGLL's *deep core belief* is that lifelong learning is comprehensive and trans-sectoral (see Table 6). In the domain of *policy core beliefs*, adults, and especially senior citizens, often lack access to quality education (IGLL, 2021), which should be rights-based (e.g., more age-inclusive), give more attention and recognition to non-formal and informal learning, encompass a multi-governance, multi-stakeholders, and multi-level approach (IGLL, 2020), and better facilitate inter-generational learning (IGLL, 2021). Fittingly, in the domain of *secondary beliefs*, besides pointing at a greater social dialogue between policy makers (at EU and national level), and civil society, IGLL also brings to the fore more dedicated fundings at all levels (IGLL, 2020, 2021).

COVID-19 has been both a challenge and an opportunity for EAEA. On the one hand, moving teaching online has stressed both adult learning professionals and learners, while outreach and access have become more difficult (EAEA, 2020a). On the other hand, learning providers and professionals have delivered quick responses, demonstrating a

capacity for innovating, and adjusting to new situations, which calls for new abilities to be learned (EAEA, 2020b), and more investments in hardware and software (EAEA I-9). Traditional participation barriers (e.g., lack of time, funding, or interest) have been exacerbated by the pandemic (EAEA, 2020b), and 'people without strong digital skills were left out, basically' (EAEA I-8) (i.e., digital exclusion). So, while digitalisation was boosted by COVID-19, it represents a challenge as much as an opportunity for the adult learning sector. Moreover, 'COVID had a big impact on the advocacy work in Brussels, because the advocacy work in Brussels… a lot is informal meetings, and this couldn't happen in the COVID time' (EAEA I-9).

For LLLP COVID-19 has been mostly a challenge. The pandemic has caused a shift to the 'virtual world', disrupted education and training systems across the continent, and raised the need for digital skills (LLLP, 2021b). Moreover, it put inequalities into the spotlight (LLLP, 2021c) showing

> a gap, a huge gap between those who are more digital capacitated, and those with less digital capacity […] [and between] those who had money and resources to find the place where they could learn, and those who didn't have the chance or lost their job in between this situation. (LLLP I-7)

For IGLL, because existing polarisation among age groups were made visible (IGLL, 2021), 'in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, the value of lifelong learning and intergenerational learning has received a renewed significance' (IGLL, 2021, p. 3).

In brief, coalition #3 advocates for adult learning being comprehensive as it makes all people active and engaged citizens, thus for a need of a holistic approach, which is inter-sectorial, multi-stakeholder, and multi-level.

Other European bodies

Besides the above advocacy coalitions three more EU-wide bodies mobilised and influenced to some extent, with their belief systems, the agenda setting: EBSN, ETUC and EESC.

EBSN is an association of stakeholders engaged in basic skills training for adults at policy level, targeting mostly policymakers in the adult learning sector at local, regional, national, and European level 'to make sure that all inhabitants of Europe have the level of basic skills they need to have access to lifelong learning, ensure their employability and be active citizens' (EBSN, 2022, para. 1). It supports implementation of the Upskilling Pathways and contributes content on capacity building and online courses in support of policymakers to the European Platform of Adult learning and Education (EPALE). Like EAEA and LLLP, EBSN cooperates closely with the EC, but counts UIL among its members. It has several memorandums of understanding with other organisations (e.g., EAEA), and is an associated member of the UNESCO Global Alliance for Literacy within the framework of lifelong learning (GAL).

Table 7. EBSN's beliefs

Deep core	(1) Helping all advancing in life
Policy core	(1) Need to promote whole-of-government approach
	(2) Poor recognition of basic skills' centrality
	(3) Need for national basic skills programs
	(4) Foster learner-centred delivery
	(5) Foster and finance basic skills' research
	(6) Lack of professional recognition
	(7) Enhance digital skills (teachers, learners)
Secondary aspects	(1) Development of Open Educational Resources
	(2) Development of national policies (coherent, cohesive, funded)
	(3) Emphasis on networking

An seen in Table 7, EBSN's *deep-core belief* is that basic skills make people to advance in life, as workers, active citizens, and lifelong learners. In the domain of *policy core beliefs* this leads to a need for a whole-of-government approach, thus making diverse ministries, public administrations and public agencies recognise the centrality of basic skills (EBSN I-11; EBSN, 2020, 2021). This means that project-based solutions should be abandoned in favour of nation-wide basic skills programmes and learner-centred delivery modalities should better respond to the real needs of people. Additional policy core beliefs encompass, on the one hand, the need to foster and finance research on basic skills and, on the other hand, to give recognition to and empower adult education professionals to also 'combine presential and online learning' (EBSN, 2021). In the domain of *secondary beliefs*, the development of Open Educational Resources (OER) is central (to support the planning and delivery of basic skills) (EBSN I-11; EBSN, 2020, 2021).

While 'in many countries, in many fields, there was nothing about the digital' (EBSN I-11), the outbreak of COVID-19 has 'dramatically increased the relevance of training in digital literacy' (EBSN, 2020) and brought attention to 'new systems of delivery of learning' (EBSN I-11). Consequently, EBSN's policy core beliefs on the whole-of-government and digital skills of both professionals and learners have been reinforced by the pandemic (EBSN I-11; EBSN, 2021), which has also impacted on the organisation's mode of working: now more EBSN meetings and conferences are held online instead of in physical presence.

ETUC represents the voice of European workers from more than 90 trade union organisations and advocates for Social Europe, fundamental social values, and wellbeing of workers. It fights for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, quality jobs and social protection, action to combat climate change. It pursues as well 'quality education for all, together with vocational training and lifelong learning, regardless of age or gender' and advocates for learning that supports labour market, as well as 'personal development and welfare' (ETUC, 2022, para. 1).

As shown in Table 8 (see next page) ETUC's *deep core belief* is that adult learning leads all workers to an adequate and fair job, but this cannot be achieved unless sufficient and fair jobs are also created and secured by EU institutions and national governments (ETUC, 2020).

Table 8. ETUC's beliefs

Deep core	(1) Guaranteeing all workers (fair) jobs
Policy core	(1) Poor inclusive and quality vocational training for all workers (2) Need for recognition of multiple skills (digital, green, social, transversal) (3) Foster a holistic approach to skills development (4) Lack of right and guarantee to skills development for all
Secondary aspects	(1) Emphasis on social dialogue (trade unions) (2) Emphasis on share responsibility (employers, employees) (3) Development of efficient governance (vocational training)

In the domain of *policy core beliefs*, it is a problem that much available VET is of poor quality, and only available to certain types of workers (predominantly male in big companies, with secured contracts). ETUC believes not only that a holistic approach to skills development is needed, but also that a plurality of skills should be recognised as relevant for the labour market (e.g., social and transversal skills, digital and green skills). In the domain of *secondary beliefs*, ETUC emphasises more social dialogue with trade unions (to secure that those EU initiatives in support of adult skilling and re-skilling meet the needs of the individuals) and adult skilling as a shared responsibility (to avoid putting 'the responsibility of up-skilling and reskilling to the individuals' (ETUC, 2020, p. 2).

ETUC is concerned that the COVID-19 pandemic will affect the budgets that companies allocate to the training of their employees (ETUC, 2020, p. 8), and for 'the millions of workers who lost their jobs as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, which entails the risk that some of them will remain long-term unemployed and eventually lose their skills' (ETUC, 2020, p. 3).

Finally, EESC is an independent EU advisory body made of representatives of workers, employers, and civil society organisations, which gives advice on EU policies and legislation on a wide range of matters, by issuing opinions addressed to the EC, the Council of the EU, and the European Parliament. It has six specialised sections ranging from social to economic affairs. Not a specialised section, in education and training EESC has expressed its opinion on issues concerned with the quality of education, apprenticeships and traineeships, and a fair an inclusive labour market (EESC, 2022). The member of EESC that acted as Rapporteur of the Opinion on adult learning (EESC, 2021), is a member of the Lithuanian Education and Science Trade Union, and ETUC, which she represented at the consultation between MESS and European stakeholders.

Table 9. EESC's beliefs

Deep core	(1) Helping active citizenship (2) Facilitating digital and green transitions
Policy core	(1) Need to support access and competence validation (2) Need to strengthen effective policies and strategies (3) Need for democratic governance, concerted action, and collective agreements
Secondary aspects	(1) Greater social dialogue (2) Emphasis on appropriate, public/private, sustainable financing (3) Greater inter-sectorial linkages at EU and national levels (4) Emphasis on EU recommendations and targets (5) Greater targeted policy measures and industrial strategies (6) Development of EU-wide exchange platforms (7) Development of public services and national financial mechanisms (8) Enhance research, data collection and monitoring

As seen in Table 9, EESC's *deep-core belief* is that adult learning supports the formation of active citizens, which can facilitate both digital and green transitions. In the domain of *policy core beliefs,* EESC points to the need to support both access to adult learning and RPL, which calls for more effective policies and strategies, thus 'democratic governance' shall be pursued in the field of adult learning at both European and national level (EESC, 2021, p. 5). Fittingly, in the domain of *secondary beliefs*, EESC calls for greater social dialogue, and 'for a platform to be set up for national AL [adult learning] coordinators, social partners and stakeholders, separate from EPALE, and for these various players to meet regularly as a network' (EESC, 2021, p. 6). At the same time, companies' need for adult learning should be appropriately financed, with remits from governments as much as companies, to complement available EU funds (EESC, 2021, p. 6). Adequate funds should support also national financial mechanisms and services to facilitate adults' access to learning opportunities, and industrial strategies for the training of workers and other targeted measures. All this is needed to meet both recommendations and targets agreed at EU level. At the same time, the EU and member states should establish a continuous monitoring system for adult learning participation, while research on skills, skills intelligence, and skills forecasts should be enhanced (EESC, 2021, p. 4).

To summaries, EBSN advocates for adult learning to help everybody to advance in life thus for the need to promote a whole-of-government approach. By contrast ETUC advocates for adult learning to guaranteeing fair jobs for all workers, thus for the need to foster a holistic approach to skills development. Finally, EESC advocates for lifelong learning helping active citizenship and facilitating digital and green transitions, thus for a greater social dialogue and greater inter-sectorial linkages to be made at EU and national levels.

Discussion

This contribution examined the political mobilisation of actors and their contributions (in terms of belief systems) to influence the 2021 Agenda setting, following the COVID-19 pandemic.

First, our results point to an increased social dialogue in the adult learning subsystem to mobilise actors, thanks to what several interviewees called an 'unusual way' MESS, a national governmental institution, pursued an agreed objective at EU level (i.e., renewing a European agenda on adult learning), while the country held the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU. It consisted in engaging in several one-to-one and collective consultations with numerous policy actors that had their strong beliefs on adult learning, and an interest in translating them into a Communitarian agenda (Weible & Nohrstedt, 2012). At EU level such actors include institutions holding responsibility for adult learning (DG-EMPL, CEDEFOP, ETF) or having official consulting roles also in this policy domain (EESC), and civil society organisations advocating and lobbying for adult and lifelong learning (EAEA, LLLP, IGLL). At national level, they comprise public institutions with responsibilities in adult learning (MESS, SIAE).

Second, our results brought to light that several actors formed advocacy coalitions (Sabatier & Weible, 2007) at both national (Slovenian) and European level and worked together to increase their chances to influence Communitarian policies on adult learning. At national (Slovenian) level MESS and SIAE are institutionally bound to work together, yet their belief systems are much alike. They share a more balanced view on adult learning for work, personal growth and coexistence in communities that requires a holistic approach encompassing multi-governance, multi-stakeholders, and multi-level (from central to local authorities) cooperation. At European level, the twin agencies specialising on VET in member states (CEDEFOP) and in transition and developing countries (ETF), despite their different missions, strongly cooperate with one another, and share the view that well-functioning continuing VET systems shall be an integral part of lifelong learning systems, thus also call for multi-stakeholder cooperation and policy coordination. Still at European level, two civil society organisations (EAEA, LLLP) have strengthened the links with one another (e.g., sitting in each other board, recalling each other position's papers) and with members of the European Parliament (IGLL). Their belief systems align striving for greater recognition of non-formal and informal (community) learning and a more adequate public funding of adult learning. They also call for a holistic approach as well as a multi stakeholders and multi-level cooperation; something on which all three coalitions have come to align over time, perhaps also in response of many criticisms towards a primarily economic, instrumental, and vocational perspective on adult learning (cf. Mikulec, 2018).

Lastly, our results seem to confirm the potential of COVID-19, an exogenous shock of a general nature, to bring about policy change in education (e.g., Morris et al., 2022; Zancajo et al., 2022). In the adult learning subsystem, it facilitated policy-oriented learning (Weible & Nohrstedt, 2012) among the actors involved in the above-mentioned coalitions. In fact, under COVID-19 the visibility of adult learning rose at European level (DG-EMPL I-12), the EC proposed a dedicated target (i.e., achieving 60% of adults in learning in the last 12 months by 2030), welcomed by European leaders (at the 2021 Porto Summit) and the European Council (June 2021). This brings to the fore not only the complexity of the EU political system, in areas of supporting competences like adult learning, but also that despite policy change occurs over a relatively long period of time, exogenous shocks can accelerate policy convergence among actors (cf. Bussi & Milana, forthcoming).

Conclusion

EU policy making is a complex matter. The Slovenian's long tradition in adult learning, combined with a higher visibility adult learning has gained at EU level under COVID-19,

helped to confirm the mandate to its Rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU to conclude with a new Council's resolution on adult learning. A goal achieved through the mobilisation of many actors working, advocating, and lobbying for adult learning at both Slovenia and European level. This confirms that neither EU institutions (e.g., the Council of the EU) or member states (e.g., Slovenia) are completely independent actors, nor are they monolithic actors. But they need internal specialisation (e.g., dedicated configurations with the Council of the EU or ministerial departments at country level) to be able to influence a substantive area (Sabatier & Weible, 2007) of Communitarian policy. However, EU institutions and member states that lead them *pro tempore* can operate according to different logics to steer the policy process and setting of Communitarian agendas. The Slovenia Presidency opted for an increased social dialogue to give 'voice' to professionals, employers, and policy makers. Although, the study restricted attention to a limited number of actors over a relatively short period of time (approximately 1 year), the existence of common interests among various actors has led to a renewed European agenda on adult learning that has gained substantial consensus, because of shared policy core beliefs – the fundamental 'glue' of coalitions, within and across the three advocacy coalitions we identified. This is reflected, as noted in the Introduction, in that the 2021 Agenda now recognises that '[a]dult learning needs a *holistic approach* including *inter-sectoral and multi-stakeholder collaboration*' (CEU, 2021, p. 8, our emphasis).

More research is needed to increase knowledge on political mobilisation in the adult learning subsystem, and its contribution to setting Communitarian agendas in this substantial field. Future research may consider, among other aspects, extending the period under consideration and assume exogenous shocks as dependent variables; increase the number and types of actors involved in the adult learning subsystem that are made the object of investigation; and differently research how coalitions advocating and lobbying for adult learning at EU level work in practice.

Notes

[1]   Please note that we consider LLLP (one organisation), rather then its individual member organisations.

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The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship or publication of this article.

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Social movement learning about violence

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Abstract

The article analyses learning related to experiencing violence in social actions and social movements. Activists may experience physical abuse from individuals and from organised entities such as the police, both accidentally and as a form of intentional repression. Applying the social movement learning approach to the analysis of individual experience, collective responses to violence, and preparations for the eventuality of its occurrence allowed us to identify the functionalities of protest culture towards de-escalation of violence. The article offers a review of literature as well as an analysis of empirical data from our previous research projects. The result of the analysis is a model of social movements learning about violence, linking individual suffering with the potential of social change.

Keywords: social movement learning, experience of violence, de-escalation, transformation, protest culture

Introduction

The possibility of violence is inherent in social movements' activity, even when they decide to adopt a non-violence strategy. They can still face police violence or develop militancy under the pressure to achieve goals (Ryckman, 2020; Adam-Troian et al., 2020a). Importantly, some movements are mainly focused on the de-escalation of violence and establishing peace (such as the ones fighting – when we are writing this article – for peace in Ukraine). Yet, they too, are subjected to state-violence.

In democratic countries[1], using physical violence against people is rarely accepted but violence appears even there, especially along with authoritarian tendencies (Jackson et al., 2018; Physicians for Human Rights, 2013; della Porta et al., 2016). The police brutality towards protesters is a disturbing phenomenon (Adam-Troian et al., 2020b). Besides repressive governments, right-wing social movements, not sharing traditional, progressive social movements' assumptions about the equality of people are still strong (Stier et al., 2017; Fischer, 2020). They promote social hierarchy as a social order (Virchow, 2017). Although at the level of the chosen tactics, they do not differ from other social movements, their specific feature is prioritising violence as a method or even a strategy of action (Minkenberg, 2019). These are often armed social movements, conducting military training for their supporters, and then 'the state loses enforcement capacity vis-à-vis the penetrating right-wing social movement' (Virchow, 2017, p. 643).

Participation in social movements is considered empowering for individuals and communities (e.g., Hall et al., 2012; Kim, 2016; Villenas, 2019), allowing them to learn democracy (understood in an equitable and participatory manner). They are associated with positive values, i.e., respecting human rights, equality, freedom. Yet, we bring here the 'other side of the coin', namely experiencing violence on the occasion of involvement. Our focus is on incidental acts of physical violence attempting to 'convince' people to withdraw or, contrary, to start protesting. We exclude, however, torture, symbolic violence, and violence in virtual spaces. Social movement learning about violence [SMLV] broadens the perspective of social movement learning [SML] by focusing it on a single challenge to respond to. One such answer is the de-escalation of violence.

We understand violence as an inflexion point in a conflict situation when using force causes bodily harm. Inspired by Wieviorka (2009) we speak both of objective (empirical factuality) and subjective (as experienced by individuals or groups) aspects of this phenomenon. Thus, learning about violence means recognising violence close to that point in order to answer the challenge properly and promptly. We believe that violence is a social fact, an issue that shapes human relations with the world. Violence accompanies the actions of social movements. People experience it and answer to the threat, and this is the base of how they learn. We stand against violence, though we cannot agree to tabooing the topic in SML analyses. Therefore, we aim to take a cold look at this hot topic and propose a way to integrate it into the wider framework of deliberations on SML.

First, we juxtapose various concepts of violence experienced by participants of social movements. Then we argue that the SML concepts has so far deliberately ignored violence, despite the fact that such events, even in their potential form, absorb social movement participants. We noticed omitting the topic of (in)direct violence in the SML discourse in both texts considered classic (e.g., Foley, 1999) and contemporary works (e.g., Hall et al., 2012). When we write 'deliberately ignored' we mean that the SML researchers focus on other threads – mostly positive ones – as if violence was not part of the experiences of social movements' participants'. Next, we will check what approaches to SML will enable us to narrow down such an 'omnivorous' concept to recognize the learning of just one issue. This critical literature review will result in a working definition of SMLV, operationalised for case analysis. Finally, we will try to show SMLV's usefulness in five diverse cases.

Theoretical framework

Physical violence is often placed in the anthropological theory of rituals, particularly in the ritual role of sacrifice (Girard, 1972). Thus, physical violence is considered to play its role in processes of community formation and consolidation. The anthropological

approach to violence by Wieviorka (2003) focuses on violence coming both from the survival instinct and as a factor triggering subjectivisation of a person or a group. The emergence of political subjectivity caused by violence followed the interface between philosophy and militant activism (Sorel, 2014). Yet, contemporary voices on violence avoid Sorel's early 20th century way of analysing its functionality. The atrocities of totalitarian states and politically coordinated terror of non-state actors anchored our thinking of violence as having to be eliminated or at least reduced.

From the SMVL's needs' perspective, Wieviorka's (2003, 2009, 2014) classification of violence was helpful in reflecting what is happening with the subjectivity of perpetrators. It is an academic answer to the instinctive question of victims of violence, 'Why did violence occur?'. This classification covers: politically significant and broadcasted events, single acts of violence that do not generate such interest but are organizationally important for social movement, or become biographically significant for their participants. In this classification, violence, understood consistently with our definition, appears in five ways:

1. a loss of meaning. Violence replaces meanings because a) the existing ones disappear or b) there is a need to express something for which there are no words or c) a speaking subject emerges. This violence type is associated with unexpected riots;
2. a non-sense. The perpetrators are politically passive and subordinate to authority. They remain indifferent to the meaning of their actions. Most often, the perpetrators are police officers;
3. cruelty. It is violence that escaped the original justifications and became a form of obtaining pleasure. Only repression stops such violence;
4. fundamental violence. Although no less destructive, unlike the previous one, it does not deny someone else's rights. It results from feeling life-threatened;
5. founding violence. It is a transformative experience, changing the trajectory of biography. It can only be assessed after some time (Wieviorka, 2003).

This classification for SMLV helps activists understand and prepare for a possible adversary, as well as recognise the dynamics of their own biographies. Wieviorka's concept is politically and educationally useful, but the effects of violence on its objects, i.e., the victims, dissolve in the narrative about subjectivation. In this context, the research by Mojab deserves attention (e.g., Mojab & McDonald, 2008; Mojab & Osborne, 2011), showing the overwhelming power of experiencing violence even in a new environment, even if it was supposed to be a refuge from oppression. It shows, too, the potential of experiencing violence as a source of learning. We are dealing here with violence that happened, whereas considering the practically useful concept of SMLV, we must consider the efforts of preparation, i.e., future violence.

The experience of violence as harm and injustice can lead to anger in society. People who experienced direct violence assist society in recognising ongoing but subtle forms of violence, which include:

> physical, psychological, economic, political and all other structural forms that intend to harm, denigrate, exclude and obstruct an individual or a group of people to function freely, fully and without fear in society (Mojab & Osborne, 2011, p. 265).

Mojab and Osborne (2011) see the need to consider structural forms of oppression, e.g., patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism, as well as new forms of violence. Such frames can be a source of motivation for action and learning, but in SMLV such

deepening of the thoughts on violence after facing its destructive nature will be considered intellectual work on the experience itself. Individual experience does not scale up easily because violence affects representatives of particular social groups, especially women, in a specific way (Monk et al., 2019). Particularly, domestic violence and war influence women's recognition of their rights and strategies of resistance (Mojab & McDonald, 2008). Spanish-speaking and Kurdish migrant women in Canada reported trauma, fear, uncertainty, and pointed to difficulties in learning, following the experiences of violence, especially in the initial stages of separation from the perpetrator. They stated that they learn the most when they receive individualised help, listen to other people with similar experiences, and when they experience participatory methods of the educational process. Trust and a sense of connection are crucial to them. Thus, researchers concluded: 'it is equally important to consider the experience of violence as a new source of learning, its basis, a learning that can transform social, sexual and political relations of power' (Mojab & McDonald, 2008, p. 51). This statement shows the relationship between the individual and the collective dimension of the experience. It is relevant for defining SMLV.

From the SMLV perspective, we may look at physical violence as a tool of activists' work (della Porta, 2008). Considering violence as a part of broader repertoire, reveals violence in its socio-political perspective in relation to the specificity of each social movement. People learn about violence and how to use it because it requires certain survival skills and its experience is usually intense. Castells (2009) and Wieviorka (2003) recognised such a perspective regarding fundamentalist religious movements. Virchow (2017) studied right-wing movements, noting that violence may appear in them as the primary tactic or goal of action, something unlikely in other contemporary social movements. Right-wing movements can combine non-violent methods (cultural performances, collecting signatures for petitions, occupying buildings, refusing to pay taxes, etc.) with sabotage and political violence (Virchow, 2017). Virchow warns against generalisations and simplifications on the issue of violence in right-wing movements:

> [...] activists of right-wing movements often make use of a 'narrative of self-defence' to justify their own violence as a response to the behaviour of others which is framed as a betrayal of the people and the nation (Virchow, 2017, p. 636).

He argues that 'the decision of right-wing movements to radicalise or de-radicalize regarding exercising acts of political violence is influenced by different factors varying in relevance during a protest cycle' (Virchow, 2017, p. 637), such as the level of the movement's success, the level of repression by state agencies. Our task is to include in the definition of SMLV this need to recognise the dynamics of violence, particularly in the context of social movements seeking to exit a violent relationship with another movement. Social movements may try to avoid specific dynamics that lead to violence, especially if they have a history of violent tendencies.

Violence is easier to study when it occurs, hence the research task set by della Porta (2008) to identify routes into the de-escalation of violence in social movements. In this respect, the research on school violence becomes useful. Physical violence is no longer an acceptable means of control or teaching in formal education in democratic societies. Many social actors (teachers, parents, researchers, and policymakers) made systemic efforts to eliminate violence from the school environment (e.g., World Health Organization, 2015). Typically, specific procedures implemented and maintained at school are behind the reduction of school violence. Particular importance is given to the 'audience' (observers of violence), who must be taught not to 'reward' the perpetrators with its spontaneous behaviour (Roland & Midthassel, 2012). Thus, monitoring and combating violence are some activities implemented in formal education, but not

necessarily transferable outside institutions, especially to social movements. People may bring school arrangements to the movements, but for the SMLV concept, it will be important to pay attention to the organisational level of learning and the responses to the audience.

Also social movements undertook a struggle against violence e.g. the feminist movements. Here, violence emerges both as a theme growing out of experience and a task set by the movement itself. SMLV must be capable of sustaining this dualism. Researchers analysing learning in the feminist movement indicate domestic violence, sexual harassment, and gender inequality as a source of experience (e.g., Simões et al., 2021). The task of social movements is to de-escalate these manifestations of violence. De-escalating violence can serve as a significant way of achieving social change, and political progress. Despite such a clear goal of de-escalation, SMLV is not a straightforward path into safety. Learning related to violence is also learning about violence. Progress towards de-escalation requires unlearning violence by abandoning specific solutions that previously seemed common-sense. It is about solutions that social movements had at their disposal, based on the potential with which participants entered and co-created the movement, e.g., their potential school experience of anti-bullying programs. We cannot reduce de-escalation to a unilateral rejection of violence. Non-violence is the default mode of many social movements, but it is not a panacea. The presence of right-wing movements requires considering the fact that people who were prepared to inflict violence will not give up their universal tool just because their potential victims do not intend to defend themselves.

The nuanced attitude of social movements to violence changes the importance of the tools developed in non-violence movements and looks like a denial of progress. We would like SMLV to shield people from resignation and pessimism. Cultural innovations remain the resort for life-saving creativity when violence is on the horizon. Nevertheless, educational researchers kept violence reduced to the role of context. In Foley's (1999) book, the described cases of incidental learning took place despite state repressions or during an armed insurgency. There, violence is treated as background, military training becomes a misunderstanding or a cover for learning something else, more important for the struggle. The issue of violence seems too fundamental to social movements to be treated merely as a learning context. Speaking in the language of Latour (2004) 'As a rule, context stinks. It's simply a way of stopping the description when you are tired or too lazy to go on' (p. 68). Under scrutiny, violence and repressions prove decisive for educational work. For example, comparative analysis of ecological movements led researchers to extracting an educational program which proved successful for the analysed social movements (Hall, 2004, 2009). Yet, researchers found counterexamples of social movements that implemented the postulated program but collapsed under the repression organised by the state (Walter, 2007).

To include violence in learning, we need to look at whether anything in the understanding of SML is preventing the problem of learning about violence from being addressed. From a sociological perspective, we can 'observe' learning through specific effects in changes in the collective interpretative framework of an issue concerning the social movement (Benford & Snow, 2000). We can follow the slow build-up of changes in understanding thanks to the recognition of the importance of culture in social movements (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991). Yet, Kuk and Tarlau (2020) showed that culture and the details of learning process were included in SML to object the state being the only entity capable of changing education. It was the transition between popular education and SML, to which Holst (2017) objected. He argued that the very terminology of SML is like a strategic concession of educators and researchers of social movements from

teaching. Teaching was an in-built challenge present in radical adult education. Holst wrote: 'we do find ourselves increasingly referring to learning within social movements, rather than to the radical potential of educating for "really useful knowledge"' (Holst, 2017, p. 81). This was an accusation against the new social movements seeking only 'useful knowledge'. The erosion could be explained by the progress of the neoliberal version of capitalism in overpowering social movements in achieving political goals. Consequently, determining the minimum necessary link between learning processes and the processes of political involvement in systemic change became an issue for SML theory. This need seems satisfied within three levels of learning in social movements, a scheme proposed by Scandrett and co-researchers (Scandrett et al., 2010). At the micro-level, participants recognise, to a large extent incidentally, what they brought into the movement. At the meso-level, the movement develops its own way of seeing the world by interacting with allies and the media. And at the macro level, we are dealing with confrontations with corporate culture and powerful groups and classes. This model incorporated the concept of the circular 'thematic universe' (Freire, 2005) and eventually turned out to be adaptable to the study of successive social movements (Kluttz & Walter, 2018). The authors emphasise that the growing nature of such transition between successive levels of learning happens only in best case scenarios. Grasping the whole process within one scheme may become complicated 'if collective learning divides, rather than unifies activists' (Kluttz & Walter, 2018, p. 103). Such learning that leads to a breakdown of action was described in relation to a student movement (Zielińska et al., 2011). We can assume that apart from people who remain active despite being devastated and traumatised (Salazar, 2008), the experience of violence in large part eliminates people from the participants in social movements. What remains when people are gone are material and symbolic traces of events (Lindskoug & Martínez, 2022) along which social movements continue their struggle. McGregor (2014) traced materialistic tendencies in SML. In his opinion, the distribution of agency beyond people into material objects does not lead to better recognition of the human potential. It does not help answering Freirian questions about how to be human in the sense of the challenge and collective work of self-improving people in humanism. Yet, the issue of violence and its organisational-symbolic-material instrumentation in the context of SML can be treated as a Freirian theme that returns and is one of fundamental 'obstacles that impede the people's full humanization' (Freire, 2005, p. 101).

Thus, we propose a synthetic definition of SMLV as any individual, group or organisational transformation of violence as an act or a topic leading to new or anew agreed and planned communication, behaviour or remembering for the common good. Now, we move on to the description of data used to test the usability of this SMLV definition.

Data and methods

We do not analyse SMLV as a process in a selected social movement. Instead, we use various examples of efforts towards de-escalation in search of patterns of a more universal character. We use both primary and secondary data.

Primary data are fragments of interviews from our research projects:

- one study focused on describing the learning of adults engaged in various forms of social and political protests. The main research problems were: What and how do rebels learn? What learning mechanisms can we reconstruct? 22 adults (men and women) from Poland, Spain, Mexico, and Belarus were interviewed from

2014 to 2017. They were selected purposefully and using a snowball sampling technique. The aim was to start by analysing the individual experiences of these people and, ultimately, to describe and understand general mechanisms of learning in the context of rebellion. A biographical approach was used in that research project. For our text, we selected excerpts of one interviewees story (Case 1);

- excerpts from group interviews (with 8-12 people, both men and women, university students at BA, MA levels and post-graduates) from the study of participants of student 5-days occupation of a building at the University of Gdańsk in June 2018 (Case 2). It was a protest against governmental plans to reform universities. Protests were coordinated between major academic cities in Poland.

Secondary data are cases of violence documented in the literature and other sources:

- Piotr Szczęsny (Case 3), who committed suicide (self-directed violence) in a sign of opposition to the policy of the Polish government (Żuk & Żuk, 2018);
- an artistic intervention using colourful balloons (Case 4) to redirect nationalists' violence to things (data from own archive and with additional information from artists-activists);
- an analysis of the potential of allied groups and social movements by Graeber (2009) - Case 5.

The case selection was deliberate in terms of the variety of social movements and ways that social movements can transform violence. We chose cases for the analysis based on our research experience and interests. We also wanted to use examples that would demonstrate the concept we are developing. We tried to represent the dilemmas faced by social movements around the world, such as withdrawal from danger (Case 1) versus standing up to the threatening (Case 2) or avoiding casualties (Case 4) versus deliberate self-destruction (Case 3). Case 5 serves as an example, revealing activists' sensitivity to violence as well as a strategic attempt to keep the polarised position together in one campaign. In our choice we relied on our shared experience and intuition. We will analyse and describe the cases, considering several dimensions forming the skeleton of our SMLV model:

A) levels of SML: individual learning, group processes, organisational experiences (cf. Scandrett et al., 2010);
B) time perspective (past, happening, and/or future/potential experience of violence);
C) type of violence in relation to subjectivity (cf. Wieviorka, 2003);
D) the 'nature' of the transformation performed (our contribution to the theory of learning).

Results

Violence appears in these cases in different ways. The nature of the transformation of violence is also diversified. The first example (Case 1) is a statement of a woman activist involved in protests and urban projects in her neighbourhood in Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain). She mentioned the risk of experiencing violence inherent in her social and political activity (protesting in particular). The most striking for her were situations of violence against other people and her friends through the broadly understood system,

especially the police. It was the situation during one of the strikes in Barcelona. Here is an excerpt from the interview:

> There were round-ups on that strike, you know, simply round-ups. [Such as] that you go there and they catch you, then they throw you in a van and take you to the police station. [...] People hid in some gates, and some undercover cop must have entered the gate with them. And when the situation calmed down a little, the undercover said: 'Let's go out because everything is OK'. They just came out in the hands of the police. It was basically arranged. The police accused them [protesters] of setting fire to the containers and beating up the police. [...] This guy [a friend of the interviewee] works in a grocery. He is a very calm person and his girlfriend is a lawyer, so [laughs]. It was the case for me to learn about all these situations. Well, getting to know how it fucks up your life for a year when many people were fighting for his freedom. Not that they have to prove your guilt. It is you who has to prove your own innocence (woman, Barcelona).

The woman talked about these situations with fear and rage at the overwhelming system. It was felt especially in the way she spoke. The fear of the potential (possible) violence was inherent in her own protest activism. Because of the interviewee's reflection on activism and the risk of violence, she expressed the need to change the form of her activism. Her indirect experience of violence seeded disbelief in her in the possibility of gaining something through street protests. Thus, the interviewee got involved in minor projects in the city district. They seemed more 'constructive' and safer, as she explained below:

> There are things much more constructive that give me something. There is some activism around in the neighbourhood: developing some local networks, talking to people. It has a lot more effects than going to demonstrations. I am glad that there are people who go to demonstrations. Personally, I stopped wanting (woman, Barcelona).

In June 2018, a wave of student protests against the reform of higher education swept through Poland. In Gdańsk, a group of around 30 activists organising discussions on the upcoming reform faced threats of violence from other students (Case 2). Provocative confrontations were conducted by members of far-right and even neo-Nazi student groups (especially, ONR, i.e., National Radical Camp).

Excerpts from the interviews show the jealousy of people who have already experienced violence towards those who have never experienced violence and are downplaying provocations. Activists who experienced violence feel discomfort, are aware of the dangers and are concerned about safety issues.

> **We've learned security rules, because of the National Radical Camp's colleagues.** They [first-time protesters] are not used to something like that [i.e., threats of violence] and I completely understand that and that's very good. It's very cool that they are not. That they have never been in a situation like this face to face. **We've learned from each other that sometimes you don't have to jump and panic.** But you cannot be too calm. You must be prepared for every possible scenario. **We've taught ourselves a little defence system**, something that we can do. Just as we can organise this defence. This is also very cool (group interview, Gdańsk).

The students established safety procedures and agreed with the faculty authorities. They also organised self-education training in self-defence. They monitored the campus and avoided walking alone, especially off-campus.

The third case proves that social movements can be inspired by both the perpetrator and the victim of violence. Self-directed violence, especially self-immolation as an act of clearly political significance is such a unique example. Only some of the suicide attempts

are recognised as both rebellion and sacrifice for a community. In October 2017, a 54-year-old man, Piotr Szczęsny (Case 3) set himself on fire in Warsaw (Poland). He made his identification purposefully difficult, and he described himself as 'an ordinary man'. It was not his spontaneous decision to make his suicide a sign of opposition to the Polish government's policy. For six months, he prepared a manifesto condemning the ruling party for the systematic violation of law, inspiring discrimination against minorities, and deliberately destroying the country's nature and educational system. Additionally, he wrote farewell letters justifying this decision. The manifesto was written carefully so that the depression he suffered from would not easily disavow his protest. In social resonance,

> [f]ragments of Szczęsny's manifesto appeared on walls throughout the country. A kind of 'scattered protests' were organized in some cities - individuals read Piotr Szczęsny's manifesto in public places. […] Portraits and slogans from his manifesto also became a permanent element of anti-government demonstrations (Żuk & Żuk, 2018, p. 614).

Civil disobedience activists from the social movement 'Obywatele RP' ['Citizens of the Republic of Poland'] kept the memory of the event alive, and the manifesto was read every day for months in some places. Protest songs helped to keep the event and its significance alive. To avoid wasting and repeating this act of violence against oneself, self-immolation had to be used politically, that is, in accordance with the perpetrator's and victim's intentions.

On the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, in March 2007 in Wrocław (Poland), a legal demonstration of nationalists marched through the city centre with the slogan 'down with colour immigration'. The collective 'maybe it's the bees' led by a post-artistic practitioner Paweł Kowzan - prepared colourful balloons to strengthen the anti-fascist counter-demonstration by creating an image of a visually unified community of people with balloons (Case 4). The act of holding a balloon and dropping it, if necessary, by protesters and onlookers, who easily adapted such an anti-fascist insignia and consequently did not stand aside, was conceived as embedded in the theory of weak resistance (see e.g., Majewska, 2019). The delicate, escaping, fun-filled balloons concentrated some of the physical aggression of the extreme nationalists in their attempt to take over the anti-racism day. Colourful balloons reduced the main slogan of the counter-demonstration 'away with the coloured ones' to absurdity. They were part of a series of activities of the anti-fascist movement understood as the 'struggle for images'. These efforts included planning the choreography so that good, empowering photos were obtained while maximising the visible number of protesters by manipulating the location of the media, the availability of shooting frames, and the placement of banners in the background of the events.

Case 5 revolves around the impact of violent tactics on social movement organisational structures in relation to their overall democratic values. As described in David Graeber's direct-action ethnography (2009), the following conversation took place in New York in 2001 in preparation for the disruption of the Quebec City Summit of the Americas:

> 'Did you see the guidelines they first proposed for the Quebec City actions?' asked Jaggi.

> 'Absolute nonviolence. Part of their principles of conduct were no 'verbal violence,' no one is allowed to use bad language. No, literally, I'm not making this up. Spray-painting slogans is a form of violence. No wearing of masks or other items of clothing that cover your face…'

> The other Canadians were joining in.

'Which then gives them the right to micro-manage everything'.

'They're total control freaks. Marshals, everything'.

'So, I don't get it,' says one of the Americans. 'What kind of process do these guys use?'

'Yeah,' another American asked. 'Are they democratic, or do they have a formal leadership structure?' (Graeber, 2009, p. 5)

Activists use relation to violence as lenses to collectively inspect a specific group or movement in order to coordinate future actions. Graeber used this approach as a method of a broader analysis of both the social order and the global resistance to capitalism. He explains why activists are concerned about the negative consequences of nonviolence:

> Anarchists tend to favor militant tactics, but they reject anything that smacks of military-style discipline. Conventional protests are strictly nonviolent, but they are almost invariably organized in top-down, military fashion, with squadrons of official "marshals" to keep order and shepherd along otherwise often completely unoganized masses of protesters. Nothing could be further from anarchist ideals of self-organization. Alternately, when groups are organized, their internal organization is often itself explicitly hierarchical, with different groups dressed in identical hats or T-shirts, carrying printed signs, with a leader with megaphone calling out the chants. (Graeber, 2009, p. 362)

He provided more general insight as well:

> Violence – particularly aggressive violence – is one of the few forms of human activity that does seem to be more efficient if organized on a top-down, command basis. This, and the concomitant need for secrecy, ensure that the more one prepares for war, or something like it, the more difficult it is to organize democratically (Graeber, 2009, p. 222).

Physical violence transitions to structural violence in his analyses, and resistance makes the veiled threats of violence real. Potential victims of violence must perform imaginative work in society, trying to recognise the perspective of potential perpetrators of violence. The threat of violence is a universal tool allowing stupidity because it liberates some people from the type of thinking that is important for democracy.

Dimensions of social movement learning about violence

Now, we will analyse these 5 cases considering the dimensions mentioned in the previous section of the article (capital letters in parentheses in the further analysis will refer to the indicated dimensions of the SMLV): SML levels (A), time perspective (B), type of violence in relation to subjectivity (C), and the character of the transformation (D). They are the dimensions of SMLV. We give a brief summary of the cases in the table below.

Table 1. A brief summary of cases

	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5
Learning	individual	individual & group	individual	organisational	organisational
Time	past & potential	happening	past	potential	future
Subjectivity	non-sense & founding	founding	founding	funding, cruelty, loss of meaning	loss of meaning
Transformation	avoidance	reading	invitation	art	discursive & theory

The first case (Case 1) exemplifies an individual attitude (A) toward systemic violence encountered as a result of participation in social movements. It is the anticipated possibility (B) of violence that influenced decisions in this case. We see two types of violence in relation to subjectivity (C) here. The first one is violence as non-sense, i.e., a result of performing duties and obeying orders by the Catalan police. Paradoxically, the perpetrator of such a bureaucratic violence 'is defined by passivity because of indifference to his own gestures, and is reduced to being the agent of bureaucratic instructions' (Wieviorka, 2003, p. 44). The second type of violence in this narrative is 'founding violence'. It is associated with the transformation of an individual's biography (Wieviorka, 2003). In this case, potential violence was one of the factors driving changes in attitudes toward activism and rebuilding the woman's life. There are two types of transformation (D) here. It is transformation towards avoidance, or the abandonment of a specific action (e.g., street protests). But it is also rebuilding and transforming activism into new forms, like urban activism. It could be a positive outcome of unpleasant biographical experiences with violence.

In Case 2, people who are happily inexperienced with violence learn the codes and grammar of violence with the assistance of more experienced colleagues (teaching-learning experience). This learning entails first recognising the potential with which activists came to the movement and then devising group responses to the challenge (A). The situation is tense, so we can talk about experiencing violence in the present perspective (B). Recognising impending violence is a fundamental (C) experience for the first-timers, similar to learning to read or write. It is equivalent to Freire (2005) description of the 'consciousness aspect' of learning, in which consciousness transformation, becoming aware of one's oppression, and learning about the tools to fight it are essential in social movements. Although Freire studied a different context and type of learning (literacy and teaching), viewing learning as consciousness-raising (*conscientização*) is useful. For SMLV, consciousness-raising is significant but not sufficient. People are being hurt, and feel strong emotions associated with their experience. Violence is a traumatic experience and something embodied. People seem to notice it in Case 2. The transformation of violence relies on turning it from an undefined and abstract context of activism into organisational procedures and physical exercises in self-defence (D). Literally and figuratively, dealing with violence is a struggle for survival in activism.

The third case (Case 3) is an individual experience of violence understood as an extreme reaction to a bad situation in the country (A). Here, we are dealing with self-directed violence, ending in the death of the social actor. When writing farewell letters, the subject referred to his act as already done (B). His physical death is not death in a symbolic sense. The manifesto he left behind inspired social movements. Here, we see 'founding violence' (Wieviorka, 2003) (C). Self-directed violence as founding violence is an experience that completely alters one's biography, as if the event retroactively turns even the most intimate biographic meanings into symbols. The very decision to commit this act is the moment of such reconstruction and the letters and the manifesto are the primary tools in this process. Action is annihilation. When people felt invited to use this event politically through the manifesto, violence was transformed (D). Apart from the obvious tragedy, this brought together people who shared a similar dissatisfaction regarding the state's poor condition. Case 3 is a specific transformation involving material interpretative frames and material memorial traces of the event. Self-immolation in the name of higher ideas destroys a particular body, but the event escapes the statistics because of the prepared narrative, which resonates widely in society. Emotions drove people to spontaneously and creatively commemorate 'an ordinary man'. His image, some

manifesto words and protest songs became part of the protest culture. Case 3 depicts the transition of learning from an individualised non-mobilised level into the level of more or less mobilised groups and beyond, as it also affected political discourse in the country. Individual sadness and anger were effectively linked with a sense of collective responsibility for the circumstances that led to the event.

Case 4 concerns learning at the organisational level (A), where the planned action is a game with a dominant discourse and it required to consider the needs of all actors, including corporate media. Activities in the public space were prepared, the outbreak of violence was potential (B). It is difficult to include this case in Wieviorka's (2003) classification because the purpose of the counter-demonstration was to de-escalate physical violence and to redirect it to balloons as non-human actors of the protest. Without 'fundamental violence' against balloons, they would not become actors of the event. The threat of violence was to guarantee the nationalist movement would be the sole speaking subject of the day. The explosive nature of the violence and the success with which the anti-fascist movement redirected it to balloons suggests that some nationalists regarded violence as a pleasurable experience (C). In this case, the transformation of violence was artistic because of the aesthetic care (D).

Case 5 is an academic transformation of violence, such as the one we intend with this article. Yet, it concerns intellectual and collective work carried out from within social movements. The case presents a collective learning process on an organisational level (A). Such learning concerns the occurrence of future violence (B), particularly, the social actors' likely reactions to it, and the ways social movements maintain coherence despite contradictory traditions of dealing with violence. Control over violence translates in this case to control over who emerges as a speaking subject and over ways of legitimate articulation (C). Activists transformed violence into a topic of discussion (D). They used it as lenses for analysis and eventually it appeared as a theory of social action with the state.

Discussion

Our proposal to study SMLV focuses on one aspect of social movements' functioning. Its usefulness comes from the fact that different social movements attach great importance to their strategic nonviolence or to their pursuit of violence. Alternatively, they nuance their tactics. The problem is not only the coordination of allied social movements, but the de-escalation of violence between adversaries.

SMLV is about changing one's thinking (Freire, 2005) and their manner of action. However, it is not only about strategic thinking in social movements. Violence is close to emotions, the body, sometimes even close to identity and physical existence. Some, otherwise critical theorists, e.g. Foley (1999) analysed many issues related to learning, but not from violent aspects of socio-political action. Interestingly, violence resonates faintly in Foley's SML analysis of the nationalist movement in Zimbabwe, concentrated on military training. And yet the violence we describe harmonises with the themes of power systems, inequality, and injustice. It is visible in Graeber's (2009), as well as Simões' et al. (2021) works. In SMLV perspective, violence is not just a learning context. It is, arguably, the content of learning and the matter to study by activists.

When proposing SMLV, we share with other SML researchers (e.g., Hall et al., 2012) fears of violence and anxiety about the unprogressive development of civilisation:

> […] social movements in and of themselves are not always progressive or making for a world that many of us may feel would be better. Religious intolerance, misogynist principles, restrictions of human rights, racism and exclusion are the stuff or catalysts of movements such as the Tea Party in the USA, the Neo-Nazi movements in parts of Europe as well as all religious fundamentalist movements world-wide (Hall et al., 2012, p. x).

However, we are setting SMLV a less far-reaching goal, merely de-escalation of violence. Hall, Clover, Crowther, and Scandrett (2012) were also concerned about the appropriation of progressive movements' methods by fundamentalist movements:

> [...] within movements that work contrary to a better, more just, sustainable and equitable world, the arts and other popular educational activities we use or put into practice are being appropriated (Hall et al., 2012, p. x).

It can be disturbing. We know from Virchow's research (2017) and from being victims ourselves, too, that radical right-wing movements may use aggressive tactics, often in disguise. However, in our opinion, it is not important who the tactics 'belongs to', but what purposes it serves. Arts can serve both a better, more just, and equitable world, and the de-escalation of violence, as in one of our cases. Therefore, we believe it is necessary to discuss violence in relation to learning. It may enrich the perception of SML.

We believe that SMLV is aligned with critical trends in e.g. (adult) peace education, which assert that 'there is much to be learnt from the experience of social movements and community organizations addressing social and economic hierarchies in highly unequal contexts' (Bajaj, 2015, p. 2). Violence is such an experience. However, peace education, in general, adheres to the principle that violence must be eradicated because it inhibits the development of human potential (Galtung, 1969). De-escalation of violence as a learning goal could be considered a weak principle of peace education at best. Any education adequate for adults in preparing them to articulate a political conflict through social movement actions publicly must consider de-escalation of violence as a necessary condition for survival.

De-escalation, rather than being an emanation of existential values, is viewed here as a creative practise with existential value. Many social movements ensure that their goals are reflected in the means by which they are achieved. This is particularly true for peace movements. Focusing on de-escalation implies acknowledging the ability of social movement participants to develop a lively response to direct violence. In relation to the strategic goals of a given movement, the tactic used for this purpose may turn out to be non-scalable. That is why we see more opportunities for SMLV in the sociological perspective of what adults learn in social movements, rather than what those movements try to educate society about violence.

The experience of violence is too important not 'to reflect and learn from' (Hall et al., 2012, p. ix), since it is inherent to activism but subjected to silent assumptions, such as it is a slippery slope into terrorism. We mean discussing violence, theorising cumulative experience, using art to redirect assaults, learning optimal collective and individual behaviour, minimising losses and restoring optimal mental state after experiencing violence, including witnessing events. We offered insight into such cases, for which we could not find equivalents in the SML literature.

Conclusion

In this article, we tried to give insight into the learning potential related to violence in the context of participation in social movements. Therefore, we focused on learning one

phenomenon in social movements. We proposed a definition that we used to organise the collected five cases. As a result, it was possible to analyse and describe the dimensions of SMLV: SML level, time perspective, subjectivation, and transformation of violence. They formed a grid of the SMLV model. These dimensions clarified the description of both violence and learning itself. Our cases were a diverse collection of SMLV examples, but the same analytical approach can be applied to any single social movement anywhere in the world. People who remain active despite the threat of violence are transforming the experience in some way. We focused on SML levels, the appearance of which is shaped by the organisational capabilities of a given social movement. We considered the time perspective of this learning because it indicates whether the participants are aware of the threats and are preparing; whether people with activist experience are able to respond immediately to unforeseen (violent) events; or whether their power is based on the processing of the past events. The typology of violence we used nuanced the occurrences of physical violence, which can be perceived similarly at the personal level (as being beaten for example). As a result, we offer a tool that, when applied to the history of a single social movement, can assist in diagnosing its strengths and weaknesses in the face of violence. Violence, as we argued in the text, is inherent to social movements, regardless of their choice of tactics. Therefore, keeping learning and violence separate is merely idealism, and it limits our ability to understand how de-escalation occurs.

De-escalation associated with SMLV has to do with the periodic latency of social movements when participants retreat or rethink their actions in the face of personal costs of activism. It allows us to see the protest culture as both a functional and humanising power able to save lives. SMLV forced us to reflect on protest action and security issues, whereas the usual SML approach focuses on the backstage of campaigns. Yet, eventually, violent events test resilience and self-care potential in social movements. We consider this a crucial discovery of our study. We anticipate that comparing social movements with varying histories and degrees of thematisation of violence, such as peace movements vs anarchist movements, will reveal structural differences in how they respond to violence. In this regard, our analysis does not allow us to draw any conclusions.

Finally, when we started this analysis, we certainly did not expect we would be finishing it in the times when war rages in Ukraine, and protesters in cities occupied by Russian forces are being shot at. We are aware of the additional attention the problem of violence receives in this context, as well as of the urgency of supporting Russian social movements aiming at peace. We hope that further research in SMLV would allow movements and their researchers to be useful on such a broad scale as well.

Notes

[1]   In the case of non-democratic countries, the problem of violence is fundamental in the sense that police violence is inherent. Furthermore, in the context of learning under a repressive state, people must prepare to be victims of violence long before engaging in a social movement.

Acknowledgement

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Vacant or viable? Niche as metaphor for understanding the status of German and Canadian research approaches in adult education

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Abstract

Beginning with Boeren's (2018) or Rubenson and Elfert's (2019) claims of under-recognition of quantitative methodology in adult education, authors use the ecological niche from biology as a metaphorical and heuristic model in order to consider the mechanisms determining the viability of research methodologies in education for adults. The authors discuss ecosystem factors affecting research methodologies and consider the situations of Germany and Canada to illustrate application of the niche metaphor. The conclusion stresses the complementary relevance and integrative value of different forms of research. Addressing diverse questions requires diverse methodologies and a rich ecosystem of resources and research capabilities.

Keywords: quantitative research, Canada, Germany, adult education research, comparative

Introduction

Some years ago, Boeren (2018) wrote on the 'underdog' of quantitative research in adult education journals. Rubenson and Elfert (2019, p. 23) in mapping the international field of adult education research are even more critical in relation to quantitative research: 'Presently adult education scholars are almost exclusively relying on qualitative methodologies, with a few using a mixed method and an almost total absence of pure

quantitative research.' The conclusion one could draw was a dominance of qualitative research in the field, although we perceive these characterizations as a too far-reaching. Previous research suggests a more nuanced situation. For example, a significant proportion of Adult Education Quarterly (AEQ) journal submissions between 1989 and 1999 were quantitative. Of the 265 quantitative papers and 170 qualitative papers submitted over this decade 24.9% of the qualitative papers and 12.5% of the quantitative papers were accepted, suggesting the issue was not the supply of such work (Taylor, 2001). Education for adults is a complex and diverse discipline, and almost every attempt to generalise across the global field is bound to be problematic. In the same way, there is a need for care when we talk about 'quantitative research' as there are many forms and applications of this broad idea. As a European example, an analysis of the European Society for Research in the Education of Adults conference programmes shows participation of quantitative research is more significant for conferences than for journals (Käpplinger, 2015). This leads to all sorts of speculative explanations, such as junior researchers doing quantitative research, which is easier to get accepted at conferences, or journal reviewers declining more quantitative submissions. Yet another international overview of the field indicates the relative health of many different ways of thinking about research into the education of adults, although quantitative research is less often present (Fejes & Nylander, 2019).

Our intention in this conceptual paper is not to insert ourselves directly into the debate about whether a certain type of research is under-utilised, but to consider how particular approaches might thrive—or not—within a specific discipline. Talking about the sociology of science, Merton (1973, p. 175) asked 'what are the modes of interplay between society, culture, and science? Do these differ in kind and content in different historical contexts?' The aim of this paper is to examine a sub-question of Merton's: how can we think about the interplay of disciplinary conditions and research methodologies within adult education, and what are the implications of this way of thinking?

This discussion does not reflect the notion of methodologies as inextricably linked to certain ontologies or epistemologies. The authors do not, for example, believe quantitative work is inherently unsuitable for critical or progressive studies and find such 'lines in the sand' (Daley et al., 2018, p. 159) profoundly unhelpful. Our definitions are straightforward and represent no ontological commitment. We see quantitative research as:

> a method of research that relies on measuring variables using a numerical system, analyzing these measurements using any of a variety of statistical models, and reporting relationships and associations among the studied variables. (American Psychological Association, 2020b).

We use a similar definition for qualitative research:

> a method of research that produces descriptive (non-numerical) data, such as observations of behavior or personal accounts of experiences. The goal of gathering this qualitative data is to examine how individuals can perceive the world from different vantage points. (American Psychological Association, 2020a).

The connection between research approaches and worldview is not currently seen as absolutely as in the past. The common ground across many research approaches is a belief and practice recognising the significance of real objects—both physical and social— and the need to understand them through human interpretation (Maxwell, 2017). This perspective, which may be called post-positivist or grounded interpretivist, leads to increased opportunities for researchers to apply the research methodology best suited to

their research questions rather than being constrained by ontological commitments. The Popperian approach to knowledge also implies the provisionality of results (Popper, 1963). Today's facts can mean something different tomorrow after new research and new insights. Accepting provisionality accepts the search for more knowledge as perpetual. In research endeavours marked by post-positivism and provisionality there are few grounds to set aside any method on the basis of epistemological purism.

If this perspective is accepted, it is no longer viable to argue for the avoidance of certain methodologies because of their inherent unsuitability for the historical or political commitments of a field. The utility of a methodology within a field depends upon the contours of the field rather than the nature of the methodology. Disciplinary epistemology is contextual and internal.

In order to understand the contours of adult education research we adopt the metaphor of *research ecosystem*. Such ideas may be familiar from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work on ecological systems model, which has been used in discussions of research methodology (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). For the exploratory discussion in the current paper Bronfenbrenner's framework is rather formal and will not be applied to a substantial degree. However, we do see any particular research project fitting within an *ecological niche*, as illustrated in two national settings. The aim is to explore how and why a particular form of enquiry becomes more or less prevalent within a particular research ecosystem. There are helpful parallels here with Bourdieu's (1984) notion of 'fields' as the social spaces within which actors exercise agency, though this discussion is more directly constructed around an ecological metaphor than Bourdieu's work.

The discussion concludes with thoughts on the sorts of factors likely to change the profile of different and differentiated methodologies within our field. Our intention in this discussion is not to promote any particular methodologies, but to recognize what can be gained—or lost—with different levels of diversity within our disciplinary ecosystem.

Research as ecosystem

Research is not an individual endeavour. Even for those who work alone on a specific project, the funding, publication, and application of their research depends on a network of other researchers and agencies. The creation and expansion of human knowledge is a fundamentally social process (Merton & Gaston, 1977). A number of metaphors have been used to understand the research community and ecosystem is one of the more recent (Naylor, 2017). There are two especially compelling aspects of this metaphor. The first is the extent to which it underlines the inter-relatedness of the elements affecting and surrounding the research process. Every organism within an ecosystem exists in relationship with those surrounding it, and a change in one organism (use of the insecticide DDT to reduce mosquitos) has ripple effects (loss of songbird diversity). The second aspect is the idea of the ecological niche—the particular role filled in an ecosystem by a particular organism. Mosquitos, for example, consume the resources concentrated in mammals and make them available to birds. No organism can inhabit an ecosystem without having a niche. Ecosystems are irreducibly complex, and fifty years after the development of the concept, biologists are still struggling to model ecosystems and the relationships they contain.

In ecological science there are three factors affecting how viable and successful a specific species will be within a niche. The first is the availability of resources. In biological terms this often boils down to sufficiency and reliability of the food supply. More food leads to more of the organism. The second is the presence and efficacy of predators. If the predators are too efficient, the prey species will have a hard time

surviving. If they are inefficient, the prey species will expand to the limits of the food supply, and then die off due to starvation. The predator/prey balance is a dynamic and ever-adjusting one. Finally, there is the availability of suitable habitat. Niches are habitat specific, so if the polar ice melts the population of polar bears must fall even if food is plentiful and predators non-existent. While biologists do not fully understand the action of all the factors in ecosystem niches, these three are viewed as starting points (Pocheville, 2015). The key principles are the degree to which the species relies on the niche and the extent to which the niche is shaped by outside forces. Research ecosystems may not appear to be as complex as the biological equivalents, but there are a number of resemblances making this metaphor a useful conceptual tool, as discussed in the following section.

One overarching similarity, however, is that ecosystems evolve over time, as do the environments into which research claims are advanced. Fields need different types of work at different stages in their development, as most famously argued by Kuhn (1962). The field's common understanding of phenomena starts off being tentative, then tends to coalesce and stabilize until the shared approach demonstrates too many failings, at which point it seeks a new stable state. This process can be seen in adult education as it tried to gain academic status in the middle of the 20th century. There was a model building period with considerable research focused on identifying and testing universalist models such as andragogy (St. Clair & Käpplinger, 2021) or participation scales (Boshier, 1971). This was then replaced in North America with a far more individualised period of exploration utilising small-scale qualitative approaches. The point here is not to argue for some sort of pre-determined epistemological progression but illustrate the way the needs and focus of a field change over time.

Factors influencing viability

Figure 1. Schematic of research niche
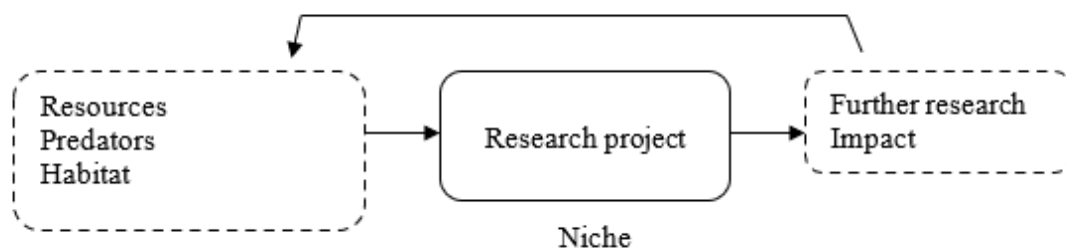
The metaphorical use of the term ecological niche to understand research is exemplified in Figure 1. On the left there is a group of factors forming, in a broad sense, the category of inputs. These affect the niche, and therefore the viability of certain research projects. To the right there are outcomes, again defined very broadly. There is also a feedback loop between the outcome category and the input category. The higher the impact of a piece of work and the more follow-up research is flowing from it, the more likely it is for resources to be available within that niche. One of the benefits of the niche perspective is helping to highlight the way these benefits do not flow back to the original research but affect the niche and therefore help to shape future projects.

In many parts of the world, central governments attempt to set priorities and goals for university research, such as the development of Artificial Intelligence systems or other

economically beneficial technologies. The incentive system leads to different forms of research being given more resources and becoming dominant in the ecosystem. A cruder example in recent years was the effect of the *No Child Left Behind Act* in the United States (St. Clair & Belzer, 2007). This Act promoted positivist and so-called evidence-based research such as Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) and specifically de-emphasized and de-funded qualitative work. The educational research field in the United States did re-orient for several years to meet these imperatives. Already completed qualitative projects were not directly affected, but the viability of the niche for future qualitative research was significantly reduced. This exemplifies the feedback system in operation.

Resources are perhaps the most obvious group of factors affecting a niche. As with biological niches, research organisms need something to consume. A supply of money for researcher time, software, data collection, travel, and so on, is crucial. Even with very significant funding, there can also be limits on the availability of specific resources. Reluctance of participants to engage with research may result in a shortage of data, as has been the case in a number of surveys. Growing skepticism regarding the enterprise of research, including the justified concerns of oppressed groups regarding the purpose and outcomes, makes it harder to build representative samples and increased participation incentives do not fully lay this concern to rest.

Secondary analysis can often have much lower resource demands than primary analysis, simply because the data collection is already complete. Setting aside the question of the suitability of primary data collection for the secondary question, the concern here is the availability of primary data. It may be necessary to pay for access. For example, some data files from Eurostat (e.g. data on the Continuing Vocational Training Survey) are only available after paying thousands of Euros for access. Some jurisdictions systematically collect data and make it available as public use data files while others do not. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has been helpful in this regard, with major survey data often published alongside an online data explorer tool. Without some form of support for these costs, researchers will not find the niche viable.

The second factor, predators, can be considered metaphorically as the existence of other actors competing for the same resources. If there are, for example, a number of other organisations or actors bidding for projects they may be able to push out the local researchers, eventually reducing the population. In many cases, international research teams may employ local researchers and reduce the supply of expertise in that way. Over recent decades it is not unusual for highly competent people from less developed economies, in particular, to be swept up by the United Nations system or the OECD.

These organisations can develop in-house or sub-contracted teams of researcher specialists developing networks of contacts and expertise over time. With the resources available to them, it is not unthinkable for them to displace local researchers over time. The *Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies* (PIAAC) (OECD, n.d.) was first developed several decades ago in the United States and Canada as a way to think about labour market fit for young people, then it was further developed as an international tool by Statistics Canada, and finally adopted by the OECD (St. Clair, 2013). The OECD is an organisation with a high brand-name recognition for policy-makers and provides resources to develop complex statistical procedures leading to definitive measures.

The lack of wide-spread methodological expertise can manifest in a number of ways. Apart from core scholars within a discipline being unable to apply a specific method, there is an associated inability to conduct informed reviews of work where such methods are applied. Lack of familiarity with contemporary techniques may leave researchers out of networks where these techniques are used, creating a vicious cycle of ever-diminishing

familiarity and competence. It may also leave the field open to work conducted at a highly sophisticated level by people but with less disciplinary expertise, which may lead to the effect that the discourses contained in this work becoming dominant or being rejected outright on grounds other than quality. It does not seem likely either extreme is helpful to the development of a discipline.

This factor may underpin a paucity of researchers able to challenge the organisations who are fulfilling the function of predators. For example, labelling PIAAC data as fundamentally flawed and reproductive is easy; examining item construction and the wider instrument to explain why this label is justified is more complex. It also becomes more difficult to assess the value of alternative approaches. The German LEO survey appears to be a more broadly based and progressive way to understand literacy skills than PIAAC (Buddeberg et al., 2021), but it is much less well-known because PIAAC has the international reach and name recognition.

Finally, in our model, habitats represent the existence of environments able to welcome and value specific types of research. If a researcher is working in a situation where quantitative work is seen as the gold standard their qualitative output will not receive much attention. This is not just an external matter, as every research area has a distinct and powerful culture (Trowler, 2014) and the results arising from a particular research project, as well as methodology more generally, have to be recognized as credible according to that culture. For many academics, acknowledgement and use of their work by colleagues is a significant reward in itself, therefore, disciplinary credibility is an important consideration. Adult education research, as any discipline, has certain normative values underlying that credibility. Such critique may be well-grounded in observations of practice; on other occasions it appears to reflect nothing more than an un-nuanced collective judgement.

The concept of niche can also underpin questions around the ways different types of questions are permitted and limited. The swing towards randomized controlled trials in the US discussed earlier can be understood as both an attempt to shape the field and to limit the sorts of questions it was possible to ask. RCTs tend to push towards instrumental, single-factor questions of teacher practice and away from the potentially political sociological questions such as who benefits from the status quo in education systems. The consideration of niche helps to clarify what is possible and why.

The real-life working conditions of adult education researchers can be seen as representing the interplay of the three factors. They are mutually dependent, to some degree. If a particular project does not fit the habitat it seems unlikely to be funded, but if the work is potentially valuable it is easy to imagine an external body swooping in to perform it. In some cases, the external body does the job much more cheaply than the local alternative, again undermining the viability of the niche.

Impact and inspiration

In the metaphorical research niche, the outputs of research are further research and impact. This is intended to parallel the biological concept, where the outputs of any niche nurture other organisms. The first output, inspiring future research, is less complex than impact in some ways. While the factors making further research attractive and viable are complex, this could theoretically be measured through citation-tracking or something similar, though in practice this can be misleading. For example, the most-cited article related to the education of adults is Bandura's 'Self-Efficacy' (1977) with over 48,000 references (Green, 2016). We would suggest a high proportion of people working in education with adults have at least some familiarity with the concept of self-efficacy and

many will know the name of Albert Bandura. However, a research paper with this kind of impact may act as a common intellectual touchstone for the field, without directly changing people's experience of being in an adult education program or the broader public understanding of the field. It seems reasonable, however, to assume such a well-known concept will inspire the framing of ongoing research.

Impact has been debated at some length in recent years, primarily by those interested in university impact. VITAE, a United Kingdom-based organisation dedicated to the promotion of research defines two types of impact. The first is academic impact, defined as: 'the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to academic advances, across and within disciplines, including significant advances in understanding, methods, theory and application' (VITAE, 2022). This impact of a particular piece of research may show up in different ways. It may have an epistemological impact, changing the way people internal to the field think about the field. The difference from inspiring future research is the conceptual advance impact implies, which is not always the case for work directly influencing research.

VITAE's second form of impact is economic and societal, defined as 'the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy. Economic and societal impacts embrace all the extremely diverse ways in which research-related knowledge and skills benefit individuals, organisations and nations' (VITAE, 2022). This form of impact may be predicated upon the demand for a particular type of research, related in turn to the non-academic audience for the work.

Considering quantitative data and analysis in the education of adults, much of the demand comes from international and governmental stakeholders. Since the accountability wave of New Public Management swept across education (Ferlie et al., 1996) state actors have been interested in quantitative measures for two main reasons. One is the need to justify public spending, which is often seen as more legitimate when numerical approaches are used. The second is comparison of systems to assess their effectiveness and allow for good practices to be identified, evidenced and shared. In addition, popular reports of research in the media are often focused on the numerical outcomes of surveys, especially in terms of percentages and change over time. It is a more significant challenge for small-scale qualitative research to result in an outcome able to be expressed in a headline. The result is a continuous wave of surveys by scientists, consulting agencies, pressure groups, lobby organisations or practice associations, some of which is high quality research and some of which can be misleading. While there is a demand for figures and quantitative research, it can be challenging to get academic research results published with sufficient profile to counter misinformation from better connected sources.

Alternatively, research impact might represent demonstrable and direct change in concrete practices or policy. When looking at policy it can be difficult to discern a direct impact as research tends to filter into policy-maker's thinking rather than explicitly influence it (Weiss, 1980). One example is the dominance of human capital theory in policymaker's perspectives, often based on exposure to the ideas of writers such as Hanushek and Wößmann (2008) on educational economics. This work is seen as implying educational resources are better spent on younger people (due to simple maths—a younger person has more years to accrue return on investment). The nuances of human capital are overlooked, with even strong proponents of human capital warning '[. . .] early investments must be followed up by later investments in order to be effective' (Cunha et al. 2005, p. 87). This example demonstrates how research can seep into policy thinking and have impact some way from its original intent.

Feedback loop

A key element in our heuristic is the feedback loop between the outcomes of research and the inputs. The products of any project, we suggest, tend to influence the viability of different methodologies within the niche in future iterations. For example, if a survey were to have enormous societal impact, it is more likely funders will support similar work in the future, potentially attracting individuals with the expertise to do a good job. Obviously inspiring future research increases the possibility of applying various methodologies by definition. The acceptance by the field of different ways on doing research will change over time as the outcomes of these approaches become apparent, changing the bounds of the possible.

The feedback loop has the potential to reinforce existing research practices or to support change. For example, if there is an orthodoxy in the field where all researchers are educated in small-scale surveys and rewarded for that work, it is likely citations and other impacts may flow from surveys, reinforcing their legitimacy. Alternatively, if conducting focus groups results in societal impact in the form of massively increased funding for adult education programs, it seems likely the research niche would become less supportive for surveys and more supportive for focus groups. Based on our own observations and experiences, it seems likely these two forces balance each other to some extent, created a slow trajectory of change over time, such as the long tail of effects brought about by the interpretivist turn of nearly forty years ago (Howe, 1998).

Applying the ecological model

To this point the paper has presented a heuristic model, based on an environmental metaphor, for thinking about how the credibility and legitimacy of certain methodologies grow or shrink over time. The balance of the paper begins by presenting case studies utilising the model of two national contexts with which the authors are familiar. It is important to acknowledge the lack of hard data regarding the topics we will be exploring, though we have backed up our observations with examples and data where possible. This helps prepare for the conclusion, where we consider what could be the implications of, and remedies for, Boeren's (2018) observation about quantitative methodologies.

Germany

Germany is a central European country of around 83 million people. Germany has had a federal structure since unification in 1990. There are 16 *Bundesländer*, each with its own education system and own ministry for education, but there is also a federal ministry for education and research. The cooperation between the federal and regional level in relation to the practice of adult education is as habitat quite complicated, but the federal level can support and initiate research. This situation presents challenges when it comes to changing practices, but is advantageous for adult education research since the federal ministry of education spends millions of Euros each year on research focused on the learning of adults. Research regarding literacy and university-provided continuing education were funded substantially in the last decade.

Since the 1990s, the European Union has also been ideologically very influential, with significant spending on applied research in adult education. For example, the issue of accreditation of prior learning is strongly promoted by the European Union. Bjørnåvold (2001, p. 112) has used the phrase 'solutions looking for problems' in order to point out that the European Union cannot intervene directly into national education system, but by

creating benchmarks and funding programs for applied research and innovative practice it can gain indirect influence.

The national research funding agency DFG (German Research Association) provides researchers with funding for non-applied research, although the selection process is rigorous and only a very small number of projects is funded annually. In addition, private foundations are also sponsoring research. Bringing together these various sources of support, the resources available for research are not as limited as in other countries.

There is also a mix of quantitative and qualitative research within the field. There are *Leitstudien* (Schlutz, 2001), meaning landmark studies, by Wolfgang Schulenberg and others in the 1960s and 1970s, in which participation in adult education was researched using questionnaires and group discussions. The divide between quantitative and qualitative methodology is traditionally perhaps not as significant as in other countries. More problematic is the degree to which research is commissioned by the federal and European levels on the basis of political agendas, creating a situation where researchers could be tempted to provide support for these agendas. Researchers like Wittpoth (2000) have pointed out the problematic quality of such research and the extent to which it may obviously serve political interests. This critique is not only valid for the research funded by the European Commission, but also for nationally funded research. Policies have a strong influence on the ideological fit of adult education research in Germany. Many research papers have evaluation as their goal, which leads to distance between practice and research. Cuts in funding for programs are supported or legitimated by evaluations, although researchers might argue in their own defence how unlikely it is for decisions to be solely based on the evaluation and not be influenced by other political rationales.

In the German context, predators take the form of private and for-profit agencies such as the Swiss company Prognos, who often win the contracts for evaluations and other quantitative studies. Adult learning and education can be also researched by people based in other academic disciplines like economics. Continuing with the example of Prognos, they define themselves as an 'economic research centre' (Prognos, n.d.), but receive public contracts for evaluating adult education policies or adult education agencies. Ministries might prefer to choose such private agencies with an extensive costumer-orientation, a track record of delivery, and the capacity to conduct complex quantitative studies instead of more embedded adult education researchers. One can have some sympathy for this decision on the part of state actors who may, in our experience, be under considerable pressure to produce deliverables for political agendas and not to produce critical reflections on political agendas.

PhD studies and their themes often follow these agendas since many PhD studies have their origin in commissioned research projects. Benchmarking of adults' participation in adult learning is identified as a core indicator by the European Union and almost all social partners agree in the main goal of rising participation levels, so quantitative research on participation in adult education and barriers is frequently conducted in German adult education research using bivariate and multivariate methods. There is a national survey on participation dating back to 1979 and has inspired the Adult Education Survey (AES), which was joined in the 1990s by a number of surveys on participation in continuous education and training by businesses. An interesting contextual factor is the national research council's funding policy in the last decades of encouraging the use of existing data rather than constructing new questionnaires. There are special institutes like GESIS in Mannheim, which store and support quantitative research by researchers using data collected by other researchers. There is also national education panel (NEPS) for the whole population, including an adult sample. In the German case adult education research is not solely done at universities, but also in non-

university research organisations like the German Institute for Adult Education (DIE) or – to a lesser degree for adult education – the Federal Institute for Vocational Education (BIBB). Both institutes are actively engaged in providing quantitative data and statistical analysis on adult and continuing education. Public funding and ministries are encouraging such research.

Overall, the picture we see in the German research ecosystem is a series of incentives for a wide variety of methodologies, though the independence of research from political agendas is not easy to achieve in commissioned research. Research in adult and continuing education in Germany is far from being the sole domain of researchers trained in adult education. Recent decades have seen a steep rise in the numbers of sociologists, psychologists, and economists who are addressing adult learning. The work is often conducted from a labour force and skills formation perspective and is open to critique for being predominantly affirmative and non-critical. The influx of resources into research on the learning of adults has increased competition between disciplines with advantages and disadvantages. Overall, research on the learning of adults is flourishing in Germany, but the challenges are to do it in a non-affirmative way and to secure the relevance of disciplinary fit in a field marked by competitive engagement by other disciplines.

Canada

Canada is a North American country of around 38 million people inhabiting the second largest landmass in the world. Canada adopted a federal structure from the beginning of the nation in 1867. There are 13 jurisdictions in Canada, each with its own education system and little involvement of the Federal government. Anglophones are the majority in Canada, though 22% are Francophones and there are many other significant language communities. While there is no federal department of education, unlike the United States, workforce development is a federal responsibility, and some education for adults is delivered through federal funding. For example, adult literacy programs across the country have received varying support from the federal government over the decades, though currently this is at a low point.

One effect of having a relatively small population divided into jurisdictions is the challenge of creating a collaborative community around the education of adults able to lobby at national level for the field. There is an active Canadian Association for Studies in the Education of Adults/Association Canadienne pour L'étude de L'éducation des Adultes (CASAE/ACÉÉA) and an associated journal published between one and three times per year. This is really the only field-based structure spanning the geographical and linguistic divides of Canada.

The resources available for research are limited. There are federal funding councils supporting work in social sciences and humanities including adult education, but researchers have to compete across all social science and humanities fields. There is considerable research support from the federal Office of Skills for Success, though this is intended for program pilots and delivery rather than basic research. There may occasionally be some small amounts of funding available at provincial level, but it tends to be amounts like CAD$7,000/5000€ for individuals to conduct specific, small-scale studies. Overall, the opportunities for adult education research are predominantly individual or small team projects supported by research councils. The one exception is the PIAAC study run under the auspices of the OECD (n.d.), which collected data from 27,000 Canadians during its last iteration in 2012.

Yet PIAAC is itself, as noted earlier, an example of predator influence. It started as an endeavour of primarily Canadian state actors using the resources of the higher

education sector (both ideological and financial) to build and conduct a unique survey. When it was recognised as being of value international players became interested and took over the process and associated resources. There is a difference between paying people inside a context to study that context and bringing in external actors to achieve the same end. The first builds capacity and connection, the second erodes them.

Habitat includes the capability to conduct research of a certain type. There is little evidence of a body of researchers with expertise in—or even familiarity with—working with quantitative data among the Canadian adult education community. Many academics came into the field after the interpretist turn of the 1990s (Howe, 1998) meaning they may have had little exposure to quantitative approaches to knowledge generation. This makes it difficult for them either to conduct quantitative work themselves or to encourage and support students to do the same. The capacity that does exist tends to be found in fields such as economics where quantitative modelling is a more common tool.

Another aspect of the North American adult education research habitat is a strong strand of resistance to the notion of education as a systemworld function (Habermas, 1984). This often leads education for adults being seen as significantly distanced from schooling, mirroring the different federal involvement in each and the way the two fields usually reside in different ministries at provincial level. While quantitative work has come to be seen as an essential aspect of initial education (St. Clair, 2023), the appropriateness of applying similar tools to education for adults has been met with skepticism.

Looking at the operation of feedback mechanisms, it seems that lack of federal adult education structures combined with limited knowledge of, and resources for, quantitative approaches result in less demand for this type of analysis. There is a limited amount of quantitative data analysis in provincial grey literature and policy documents but it tends to be numerical reports and secondary analysis rather than a way of examining substantive primary questions. The lack of purchase gained by PIAAC results in Canada (St. Clair, 2016) reflects a lack of mechanisms able to respond to large-scale studies in practice or policy. At the same time, randomized-controlled trials and other quantitative tests of pedagogical principles are rarely seen as feasible or desirable, even if the capacity were there. Experience suggests journal reviewers may see 20 theoretical or qualitative studies for each quantitative study, and the latter are usually written by people from outside the immediate adult education field. This means there is less visible opportunity to publish quantitative literature, and it is harder to find models for such publications. The CASAE/ACÉÉA journal, referred to earlier, last published a quantitative article in 2016 (see Livingstone & Raykov, 2016).

Taken together, these factors inevitably bear upon the sorts of impact expected from quantitative work. For researchers who are being strategic regarding their work, the lack of resources, tendency to use non-local actors and organisations, limited impact, and perceived incongruity with the field cannot lead them to believe the rewards of quantitative approaches in any way offset the investment. When the leading journal in the field so strongly features qualitative studies, often small-scale, it would take a very determined scholar to swim against the tide. This seems especially true in the case of new scholars who are under considerable pressure to publish as often as possible in high-profile journals, but it also limits the opportunities for community-based scholars to see models of how their work can utilise quantitative analysis.

Overall, Canada appears to demonstrate a strongly determined niche for adult education research, tilted towards small scale studies. Where the impact of any form of research is likely to be so limited it follows the research niche will not appear viable, a situation the feedback loop is likely to reinforce.

Discussion

It would be a fascinating and potentially useful project to conduct an empirical study of the factors we have discussed in this chapter. While we do not see any immediate contradictions in the ecosystem approach we have laid out, empirical data would help with understanding the nuance and implications of the ecosystem model in more depth and specificity. Even at this point, however, we are prepared to present some initial thoughts on the implications of this framework.

Our first comment is that Boeren's analysis (2018) appears to apply in some niches but not others. While it may make sense if only the North American academic context is taken into account, there appears to be significant evidence of a healthy niche for this kind of work in Europe and elsewhere. Indeed, we would suggest looking beyond the articles published in purely adult education journals to discover a lively interest in all sorts of methodologies in many places. A strong example is a report published in late 2021 by the C.D. Howe Institute, a policy think-tank, which uses broad scale quantitative data to make a strong case for enhanced lifelong learning across Canada (Mahboubi & Mokaya, 2021). The first lesson we draw from our argument is the high level of variation of relatively small-scale niches. To return to Brofenbrenner's (1979) model briefly, it appears we should think much more in terms of exosystem and mesosystem than of macrosystem: while adult education research is a global phenomenon, the influences shaping the particulars of the niche appear more local than is sometimes assumed.

The German context offers resources, expertise, relevant questions, and impact capable of supporting quantitative analysis. It may not always reflect full fit with the habitat, however. Extending our metaphor, this suggests quantitative work on the education of adults will survive but may move to another niche. In less picturesque terms, this would imply a continuation of the movement of this type of research away from specialised adult education researchers and towards economists or other generalist quantitative researchers. It seems likely this will exacerbate the issue of methodological expertise and erode quantitative capacity within the field, reflecting our earlier comments on the metaphorical role of predators. The second lesson is that predators may move in when a niche is not being fully filled and their presence may tend to transform the niche in ways making it harder for the original species to re-establish themselves.

In both case studies a key question arises in slightly different forms, and this is the extent to which quantitative approaches driven by a central government can contribute to counter-hegemonic perspectives. There is a tendency for current forms of quantitative research to demonstrate naïve scientism (Pigliucci, 2018) and to work solely within existing structures. This does not have to be the case, but demonstrating alternative approaches means engaging with this form of knowledge creation, and this in turn requires creating niches in our research ecosystem favourable for the development of quantitative work for and by adult educators. The other side of this question is how critical researchers can feed into policy if they are pragmatically restricted to small-scale studies seen as less valid by policymakers (partly because of the choices taken by those policymakers themselves). The habitat required to support critical questioning may not align with the available niche. The lesson derived from this insight is that the fit of resources, predators and available habitat is the key factor in making a niche more or less viable.

It seems there may be value, in line with Boeren's (2018) argument, in supporting adult education research able to contribute quantitative insights to policy conversations. In specific terms there is a need for increased resources, though this may be less of a barrier than it appears. There is a great deal of open-source data available at no or low

cost, much of which can be configured to produce valuable and interesting information. For example, PIAAC has a huge amount of background data gathered primarily for weighting the skills measures, but representing a gold mine of data in itself. In terms of research skills, there are opportunities to create multi-disciplinary teams including people with deep experience in working with quantitative data. By participating in these teams, adult education researchers can both see the work being done and learn how to do it for themselves.

This in turn helps to resist the mischievously named research predators by building the capacity of our field to talk in terms policymakers find convincing. Research has the potential to be seen as doubly knowledge-generating. On one side lie the actual research findings and output, with all the implications they may hold for policy and practice. On the other lies the capacity developed by working in certain ways with data. Without the opportunity and support to engage with the currently powerful discourses in many settings, adult educators are less able to make their case. This seems especially true if that case is critical.

The habitat could potentially become more supportive by showing colleagues the value of quantitative research for answering fundamental questions about our field. An example is the question of what proportion of adults engage with formal or informal adult education each year. In Germany this data is straightforward to find, while in Canada it used to be available but is not any longer. It is important to show how quantitative work can be critical and challenging. The correlation of poverty, ill health, and limited skills levels is almost irrefutable (St. Clair et al., 2010), and this quantitatively demonstrable relationship contains within it the moral weight of the education of adults. We create ideological value for quantitative research by engaging with it and changing the purposes to which it is put.

Conclusion

The use of an ecosystem metaphor as a heuristic model for discussion of research proves useful in moving the conversation beyond the benefits and limits of any particular methodology to a higher-level focus on contextual factors shaping its perceived value and relevance. In the end, our exploratory case studies raise as many questions about the research formations in each country as they answer. We conclude Boeren (2018) may have a point, but not necessarily the point claimed in that paper. Quantitative work is continuing in varied and influential ways in many different contexts. The issue to be considered is not how the work can be encouraged but how it can align better with disciplinary norms and how it can have the impact the field needs it to have. We need to understand and re-shape the niche.

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Routes and revisits: Places of tribulations and places of desire in the narration of Z.

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Abstract

This article covers the places that came to constitute the pivotal points of reference in the narration of the life of Z., a female migrant from Albania to Greece. It attempts to highlight the function of such places as cognitive and reconstructive frames that signify the life, memories and biographical plans of the narrator, the shaping but also the reception of a personal and social identity by herself as also by others. It attempts to point to the meaning of such places not only in the sense of the scenography (setting) of a life and its narration, but also as the defining elements in the trajectory and self-knowledge of an immigrant.

'Narrative analysis' and 'process structures'

Z.'s biographical narrative constitutes part of a doctoral thesis undertaken at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki with the title 'Biographical narratives and biographical identities of female Albanian immigrants studying at Greek universities. Roots and routes'. Methodological tools employed in this study include Fritz Schütze's 'Narrative Analysis' and the ideological-critical method. The theoretical framework of the thesis is based on the working assumptions of 'Critical Pedagogy', 'Critical Theory' and on a combination of assumptions that although come from different paradigms are not mutually contradictory.

Fritz Schütze's 'Narrative Analysis', developed in Germany in the mid-1970s in the context of biographical research rooted in the North American traditions of interpretive sociology, such as the Chicago School (Tsiolis, 2006; Apitzsch & Inowlocki, 2000), is both a theoretical approach to the study of biographical narratives and a methodological

proposition for analysis. 'Narrative Analysis' focuses more on "the way individuals experience, process and deal with changes in their state as dynamic processes' (Tsiolis, 2006, p. 58) and is therefore considered appropriate for the study of biographical narratives of social subjects, be these individual or collective, who have experienced unexpected situations that have led to violent rearrangements in their lives (mental disorders, drug addiction, educational difficulties, imprisonment) causing a host of consequences. For the same reason, it is considered to be suitable for the study of biographical stories of immigrants, who, due to their immigration history, have experienced crucial social changes and transformations that have largely shaped their living conditions as well as their way of perceiving them.

The German sociologist Schütze focuses his 'Narrative Analysis' on how the social subject deals with the changes she/he has been exposed to during their lifetime. He observes that the ways in which individuals are involved and interpret historical processes play an important role in the overall formation of these macro-historical processes. On the other hand, he claims that the deeper the researcher delves into the riddles of a biographical self-presentation, the more she/ he is confronted with the very structural processes and the human efforts undertaken to reconcile with them (Schütze, 2014, p. 227). He distinguishes the ways of experiencing biographical changes between those that characterize the 'heteronomy' of the social subject and those that characterize his 'autonomy' and 'self-determination'.

'Process structures' emphasize, on the one hand, the internal structure of these sections of experiences and, on the other, the fact that they are not static but capable of changing (Tsiolis, 2006). In this way, the final articulation of these structures can depict the 'timeliness of life story' (Tsiolis, 2006, p. 71) and thereby renders, even from the point of view of the present, the biographical experiences as they are distributed in the different periods of life of the individuals and ultimately helps in the understanding of 'how someone became who he is' both as a form of self-knowledge and as vital information for the researcher himself (Tsiolis, 2006, p. 71; Szczepanik & Siebert 2016, p. 287). To put it in Schütze's (2016) own words, 'the life history of a person can normally be seen as a sequential combination of biographical process structures' (p. 12).

Furthermore, 'process structures' demonstrate the fact that biographical narratives are treated by Schütze as the place where social and historical events meet the world of the human subject and are therefore a privileged field for studying the relation between structural parameters and individual understandings and actions. That makes Schütze's 'Narrative Analysis' – among other biographical methods – capable of providing a 'sophisticated stock of interpretive procedures for relating the personal and the social' (Bornat & Wengraf, 2000, p. 2). This would help inform standard sociological practice of the importance of the individual's point of view, though the extent to which individual agency can influence structure has yet to be shown (Rustin, 2000, pp. 45-46).

The places of a female immigrant

Places and spaces are tightly interwoven with the life of an immigrant. The particular place or places are synonymous with the decision to migrate, the migratory journey, the route, the country of one's destination, one's personal and social identity, one's very own life. The place of birth, the place of resettlement and the intermediary places superimpose a second design upon the geographical map – that of the personal: a map of the thoughts and the emotions, the experiences, the trauma and its transcendence, that of one's victory and defeat, the process of 'reinterpreting and redesigning' (Dausien, 2000) a person's identity and biography. The places in the life of an immigrant are synonymous with

consecutive uprootings, frequently translated into 'biographical ruptures and which dictate a redefinition of one's identity' (Schütze, 1999; Tsiolis & Siouti, 2013, p. 391), although they can otherwise signify a 'journey', a 'process of becoming' (Lutz, 2010, pp. 299, 301) with emancipatory and liberating attributes. In all cases, places become the landmark of one's biographical trajectory and at the same time landmarks in one's memory. In other words they function, on the one hand, as reference points of the external, visible life, which can be traced through concrete places and, on the other hand, as reference points of the internal, the invisible life, that wherein places are the signs the migrant follows so as to return to that which she had once left behind and which acquires within her the status that the 'abreactionary experience' determines (Freud, 2019). Lastly, places can themselves be considered, precisely in the same way as the subjects and the relations that conjoin them, as also the social worlds with the concomitant social processes that develop within them (Tsiolis & Siouti, 2013, p. 394), as 'cognitive organizational frames' through which the narrator forms her narration (Schütze, 2014, p. 114; Tsiolis, 2006, p. 67), and through which 'the reception and experience of events is structured' (Tsiolis, 2006, p. 68).

Z. is an immigrant from Albania. She made three attempts to enter Greece, together with her mother, from the age of five and up to the age of ten. She finally settled in Greece in 2008, at a time marked by the onset of the major economic crisis that was to impact the country. After a difficult educational journey and as hard a struggle to make ends meet, today she is studying at the Nursing School of a Greek university. In the narration of her life, particular places and spaces mark the journey towards her economic survival, adulthood and emancipation. The orphanage, the house in the village, the borders, the detention centre, the squalid apartments where she stayed with her mother in her new country of residence, the schools where she studied and yet again the orphanage, this time as her life's dream, all become the places as reference points in the narration of her life, which are at times conveyed in words and at other times through silences. The words and the silences of places constitute her world.

The multiple signifiers of the place of birth

At the start of her 'self-referential self-observation' (Tsiolis, 2006, p. 137; 2014, p. 239), Z. presents herself as the daughter of a young woman from a poor Albanian family. The daughter would never get to know her father as he had abandoned her mother on hearing of her pregnancy. As an illegitimate child, Z. had also been unwanted by her mother's paternal family, and that is why the mother would be forced to leave her at an orphanage for the first four years of the girl's life, although she would sign a document prohibiting any adoption. The mother confesses that she too had been as much unwanted given that, as an unwedded mother, she would carry a heavy stigma both as regards her own family as also with respect to the rural social environment wherein she lived.

> When my dad discovered that she had fallen pregnant he deserted her (pause). It was a time in Albania when it was a shame to have let's say a child out of wedlock. I remember then when my mother didn't want to announce it because she knew she'd be subjected to […] That she'd be given a bad name in other words, that an illegitimate child was considered to be a shame. When my grandfather heard about it he would tell her that he'd commit suicide if I was brought home.

Albania therefore constitutes the place which, in Z.'s narration, is interwoven with the shame-stigma, a stigma manufactured by 'male sociodicy', according to Bourdieu (2015, p. 63) – that is, by the historically formed pre-acceptances relating to the 'legitimated,

primarily sexual, uses of the body' (Bourdieu, 2015, p. 64) of the male and the female, which for the Albanian society of at least that period would not include premarital relations and an out of wedlock pregnancy, viewing these as dishonour for the woman and her family and therefore 'as something which shames them and of which they would willingly see themselves being deprived' (Goffman, 2001, p. 70). This shame-stigma is thereafter also transferred to Greece, where the mother's two brothers reside, and who insist on treating her as a scapegoat.

For Z., however, Albania did not merely constitute a place interwoven with the gender-based stigma and its ramifications on her life – it was also interwoven with the stigma relating to that of social class, as a place of poverty, deprivation and the absence of any positive expectations.

> Because she [her mother] knew that if we stayed there she wouldn't be able to do anything neither would I be able to do anything with my future schooling there if you don't have the money you cannot pursue your studies and in the village where we stayed it was very difficult and rather than me not going to school and spending my time ploughing the fields so to speak she preferred that we make the attempt to come back to Greece.

With its double signification, it is the place of birth that bolstered the need for migration and repeatedly prompted the mother to make the decision and undertake the attempt to migrate. We could say that these two factors comprise the structural and cultural conditions within which the story of Z.'s life has unfolded (Tsiolis, 2006, p. 156). They constitute the 'submission without too many words to the force majeure of things' (Bourdieu, 2015, p. 137), but which is a submission that Z.'s mother would not accept and would attempt to change through the decision to migrate. On the one hand, this concerns the conditions of 'structural violence' that entrapped mother and daughter into successive processes of deprivation, since low income can only ensure a low-level education and healthcare as also a low level personal and social power, given precisely the manner in which these fields are interconnected and interdependent within the social structure (Galtung, 1969) and, on the other hand, it concerns the conditions of 'cultural violence' (Galtung, 1990) or 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 2002, 2015), which denigrated the mother, forcing her to leave her daughter at an orphanage and to later on migrate.

Despite this, Albania is also and simultaneously the place of the joyful moments of the age of childhood, of Z.'s acceptance at some later date by her mother's familial environment or at least as that which Z. perceived as an acceptance in the course of her pre-school and initial school-going age. An acceptance, however, which would not in any case stop her mother from insisting on her plan to migrate.

> I remember that we then went to the village. There I started to gradually adjust. It was difficult for me as I had grown older and in the town I had had access to amenities and there things were very different but later as time went by I adjusted more and more. Okay later I'd love my mom as I had understood she was my mother then I remember that my grandparents had also come to love me they embraced me my cousins the older one I remember that she would come over and we'd play together and that was very nice because whereas up to then I had no one and I considered all of them foreign to me and I hated them I now had a child to play with me my cousin. I now gaze the way I do because I form pictures in my mind. I had a big doll (she laughs) that I played with and it was my friend and I played with her.

Lastly, Albania is the place of uprootedness and irrevocable separation, something which often happens either in the lives of people who migrate long distances or in the lives of those who, albeit they emigrate to neighbouring countries, are incarcerated within a

reality of a settlement that is not legalized by official documents and thus they move in the realms of illegality and precariousness and which prohibits the possibility of returning to one's homeland, thereby attaining what has been described as 'a more or less systematized character of entrapment' (Schütze, 1999, p. 156), something which we shall more clearly see in what follows.

> And I remember that she hadn't said goodbye either to her grandmother nor to her own parents, my grandparents, and neither had I done so and the truth is that this has stuck inside me (her voice breaks and she cries) and it has stuck inside me more so as regards my great-grandmother who suffered from Alzheimer's and was also blind and when we departed the final day she had her head turned towards the window as if sensing that we would be leaving (pause). It was the last time that I would see both my great-grandmother and my grandfather. They died and unfortunately I couldn't even attend their funeral because of these much-vaunted papers, yes.

In the narration of her life, therefore, Z's place of birth appears to be charged with familial and social woes and abrupt changes which, in combination with the great poverty and the absence of any prospects for a better life would play a decisive role in determining her mother's insistence on her plans to migrate, as also on determining their life in their new place as immigrants.

The orphanage

The orphanage is a specific place within the wider framework of the place of birth, and which occupies a central position in Z.'s narration. It constitutes the first and the final place within which Z. places herself as an 'active Ego' (Tsiolis, 2014, p. 228). The orphanage is presented as a point of departure and as a conclusive end point in her biographical narration, as a thread that permeates and unites her experiences, conferring a specific meaning to these, while at the same time being projected into the future as a life plan, the meaning of which is revealed in stages in the storyline of her biographical history.

> So her solution was to leave me at the orphanage, that's what she had chosen. She left me there when I was ten days old (pause – her voice breaks). She had told me she had done the paperwork to get me back, if she hadn't done that paperwork I would be adopted and she wouldn't be able to get me back. She'd come to see me. I can only remember a very limited number of scenes at the orphanage but I do remember them and although I am twenty-two years old I do remember certain scenes I have them inside me. When I was four years old she came and took me back. I remember the day when she had come and she had taken me. I remember that I didn't want to depart from there because we were many kids together and we all shared the same pain, essentially that we had no family and so our family was us kids, the one for the other.

Despite the fact that the orphanage hosts the 'pain' and the loneliness of orphans, the narrator presents it in a positive light as a collective space wherein there is a love and a comradeship strong enough to counterbalance the absence of the 'natural' family. The orphanage resembles a 'circle of co-sufferers from which she can seek moral support and feel comfortable, as if at home, accepted as any other normal person', as Goffman (2001, p. 85) would put it, a hospitable place offering understanding, love, solidarity and geniality.

> But afterwards I have in mind I tell myself after the four years I wish somehow something to do yet a little again with children that's what I want, in other words I want to somehow

get involved with babies. The truth is that I've always had that in mind. Of course I've had it in a rather romantic way it's possible that it never turns out to be that way. I wanted to work in an orphanage myself because that has remained in me, not because I've been in an orphanage but because I believe that it would be the one and only thing that would make me happy to be going to a place and be taking care of children that need to be loved. Perhaps that has left its mark on me that which I have myself lived and I want to be like certain ladies who although they were irrelevant to us saw us as their children and they brought us up because being brought up for four years by a person is not a short time. I wish to do the same thing for other children and I am thinking that maybe through my studies in nursing somehow perhaps I'll manage to enter that field although I don't know if I'll succeed.

The 'form of the circle' in her narrative follows the 'form of the circle' in her life, if only as an imaginary construction. The self-reflective 'processes of constructing the identity of the self' (Tsiolis, 2006, p. 122) commence from the institution and return to it. Correspondingly, her life begins with her 'abandonment' at the orphanage and is consummated, at least as a conception, with her wish or her plan to now return to it as a professional, as a specialized functionary, capable of offering her services to the children who in a future present would be in need of her, precisely as she was herself in need of certain others in a distant past. A temporal and biographical correlation that becomes feasible, as we shall see further below, due to her university training, the biographical planning which this allows and the restitutional moves that can be materialized due to such training in the personal life of Z.

The place of birth under the 'gaze' of the new homeland

The place of birth in Z.'s life history is not merely charged with the particular gender and class specifications discussed above but also by the manner in which these specifications are reinterpreted by the inhabitants of the place of resettlement as also by the Greek polity itself through the political treatment reserved for both Z. and her mother – and that, given the supplementary burden of the Greek 'gaze' as regards the Albanian national origin.

> Yes okay simply as regards that part that you're from Albania and that which we faced was the problem that we didn't have the papers and we couldn't assert our rights, because whatever happened they'd tell you where are your papers? You're an illegal immigrant okay you're going back. You can't talk about anything, anything, anything.

> And always that thing about the papers and every time mother found a job 'do you have the papers?' they'd ask 'no' she'd say. I remember often enough when she'd call them on the phone and tell them 'I'm calling about that ad' 'where are you from my girl?' and my mom would say 'from Albania' and she'd hear 'oh sorry we're not interested' and another would say 'you're from Albania and we don't want to employ a person from Albania', just like that, right up in your face.

For the two women, Greece becomes the place of a lawless life, a life lived in secrecy, a residence permanently contingent on the possibility of being deported, an everydayness that is at stake. At the same time, Albania as immersed in the Greek national ideology now becomes for Z. and her mother the place of a degraded and inferior origin, which cannot account for any legal documentation, especially if you are poor and cannot pay for it. A place the persons of which are automatically placed in a state of subordination as soon as they cross the coveted borders, since in the words of Spivak 'a human without papers is the most modern form of the subordinate human' (Batler & Spivak, 2015, p. 88).

In her narration, Z. laments that which her mother and she became in the place of their resettlement and that which the new place became for them. She talks of the person without official papers, the invisible, silent person existing in a legal limbo, 'the pariah', as Arendt states, 'who does not have the right to have rights' (1976, p. 296), who lives 'in a state of 'non-worldliness' and invisibility in the public space' (Arendt et al., 2015, p. 101), the 'non-citizen' (Arendt et al., 2015, p. 46), since 'in the system of the nation-state the so-called sacred and inalienable human rights prove to be completely unprotected precisely when they can no longer be characterized as the rights of citizens of a certain state' (Arendt et al., 2015, pp. 41-42). If for the present-day nation-states it is only the naturalized person who possesses rights, then the foreigner lives as a 'subhuman' (Macedo & Gounari, 2008, p. 57) until such time as he comes to attain such rights, living in a place which, from being the place of one's desire, becomes the place of one's ordeal and foreignness. Z's narration therefore confirms that if 'one can be more or less a man to the extent that one is more or less a citizen' (Kristeva, 2004, p. 126), then he who is not a citizen cannot be a complete human (Arendt et al., 2015).

> It's ugly because that which worries me is why the titles attached to your country or a residence permit defines you as a person, that's to say why do people treat you differently with a residence permit and why do they treat you differently if you're without the residence permit. In other words where do I begin from a simple person in the street up to someone in a hospital, in a public service, if you don't have that permit it's like being someone […] fine, okay a simple nobody (her speech pace speeds up here). What I'm saying is no exaggeration it happens we have lived it. In other words you could be going to the hospital and because they couldn't identify you 'there's nothing we can do for you, and how shall we examine you and […]' It was then clearly a question of humanity as to which doctor you'd be lucky to find whereas now if you go and you present him with your AMKA[1] he is obliged to be at your service, if I may put it that way. Isn't it ugly? Yes, it's ugly it's ugly to be afraid of going to the hospital because you don't have the papers. What does it all mean? Must I die so as to have the right? It's a bit odd.

Under such circumstances, the new place becomes the place of degradation and dehumanization, the new prism through which Z. as an immigrant views herself not transcending but confirming for herself the image of the deprived and debased and of a life which both in her place of birth and in the new one becomes all the more so that which is encapsulated in the phrase 'an unprotected life' (Batler & Spivak, 2015, p. 62). In a world wherein citizenship and ethnicity are the criteria whereby people are separated between those who are 'ours' and those who are 'foreigners', Z. is subjected to the persistently repeated stereotype of the – as 'ethnically categorized' (Dragona, 1997, p. 95) – inferior Albanian, someone who functions as the 'legitimated target of prejudice' (Dragona, 1997, p. 97). In the new place, Z. is confronted by the fact that people such as herself have been, as Batler states, 'kept as second-class citizens, insecure in the face of state authority and without access to any of the rights and entitlements that constitute the privileges of citizenship' (Batler & Spivak, 2015, p. 69). In such a place but also in such world that which is reserved for the illegal 'others' is not simply the reality of marginalization but also that of a total indifference towards them, and which can itself even end up being a criminal indifference.

The borders

Borders are by definition a place of transition, a crossroads both in the literal as also in the metaphorical sense as far as the migrant is concerned. It is the place wherein exit and

entry meet, the before and the after, the known and the unknown. It is the boundary between the old and the new life, the symbolic point of transition from a previous to a new reality and perhaps from an old to a new identity. The crossing of the borders is often a difficult or even risky undertaking. The borders may be crossable or uncrossable but even if someone manages to traverse them, he may be 'returned' there to where he started off, despite his will. Borders can function as a dividing line, though also as a bridge. In Z.'s reflective narrative, borders acquire all of these meanings.

> It was wintertime and we were coming from the mountains and we were walking for hours on end and we had a smuggler essentially it was he who helped us cross helped us reach up to the borders we paid him and then he'd return back and from hence on we didn't know him nor he us. I remember I was small and since I got tired I'd tell mom every now and then 'my legs pain, my legs pain' I'd hope that he'd carry me on his shoulders it goes without saying that he'd never take me on his shoulders in fact that night, late night we had arrived at the Greek borders, it was raining.

> They put us in prison for a night since we weren't in possession of papers in other words likes illegal immigrants. I remember that night in prison. It was mom and I in a room. Next to us there was a room full of men. The truth is that inside our own room there was a bed made of concrete which was frozen and I remember that all (the word is stressed) of the men from the cell next door had taken off their jackets so that these be placed on the bed for me to sleep on without feeling cold I remember that and I also remember mom taking tissue papers from a little packet and placing these on the pillow so that my head wouldn't touch the dirty pillow if I can put it that way. Although we were illegal immigrants and they say that the policemen treat people badly and suchlike in our case they had treated us well. I remember they had asked me if I wanted to drink milk and I had grimaced with irritation as if they were to blame although they weren't to blame and the next day it was morning they took us and placed us in a police van and made us cross over the Albanian borders again.

The journey of the two women from the one place to the other seems to have yet once more followed the well-trodden path of people who do not have the money to acquire the necessary official documents. The illegal border-crossing gets mother and daughter involved in procedures and incidents that have become familiar usually through newspaper reporting: the payment of a sum of money to a 'smuggler' who undertakes to lead the would-be immigrants to the receiving country via safe, secret crossings, the fear, exhaustion, security force inspections, arrest and temporary imprisonment, something which has nonetheless been surprisingly recorded in Z.'s memory as a tender experience where humanity and solidarity would prevail.

The psychic signifier of the borders changes its hue when, eight years following the third and final migratory journey, Z., by now a student and in possession of legal documents, again crosses the borders but now in the opposite direction so as to meet her relatives. Legality gives her the possibility of finally reconciling herself with the two countries that are decisively interconnected with her personal experiences. The lifting of the prohibition and her ability to cross the borders from one country to the other under normal circumstances functions as a second restitution.

> I remember that sentiment which when the coach arrived at the borders was exceptional. The most beautiful sentiment (she smiles, her voice becomes joyful). I don't think I've lived a greater happiness. I remember how they'd put that rubber stamp and then the coach crossed over to the Albanian borders (her voice in the course of the description resembles a smile) and it was all so perfect and memories came to mind of how we came that we came from the mountain in secret and now I could return back and be legal and to be able to go to my country and not be a foreigner either here or there (her voice is exalted), to be able

to be legal in both countries (laughs) essentially, so that yes that was the most beautiful as regards this case.

The legal border crossing seems to establish, not only a practical, but also a psychic line of communication between the two places of Z.'s life – places which had thus far existed as the two poles of a continual friction, adversarial and essentially excluding one another. What is established is a unifying flow, a connective continuum that had violently been interrupted for a full eight years, with the final journey of the illegal migration from Albania and with the illegal residence in Greece. Further, it is noteworthy that Z. does not ever refer to a new national identity. She does not seem to feel that the documents of her legalization, which she gradually comes to possess, make her be a Greek. It seems as if the transformation of national identity is not that which concerns her – rather, what she only cares about is to be able to live in both countries simultaneously, unifying her experiences into one uniform, coherent and reconciled biographical history of her different places.

The houses

The house is usually the place that shelters the private life of persons and is stereotypically related to security and warmth. In reality, it is a place of a subject's social specifications, intertwined with the 'life disposition' and the 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu, 1999, 2002, 2015) originating from one's class position and economic standing. In the case of Z. and her mother, the places they were to dwell in for at least those eight years of their resettlement in Greece confirm and intensify the social attributes of the 'deprived' and the 'degraded' (Goffman, 2001, pp. 66, 223) which characterize them as poor Albanian immigrants without official documents.

> We had found a place that was in the basement and it was very damp the ceilings were full of mould and there like this it dripped and we simply had a bed nothing else in there and I remember how mom would take it out to the balcony so that we wouldn't have all the dampness on us how we would sit outside so as to avoid the stink. I remember that she'd be very many hours away from home and I'd sit all alone in that room. Okay it wasn't the best of things but I knew I just had to go through it.

> Basically all the years were difficult but those first years were very difficult because we stayed in a house that wasn't a house it was an office (stresses) and didn't even have the basics it didn't have running water didn't have electricity didn't have a balcony to be able to get some fresh air it had a rotten bed where you'd lie down on its one side while the other side would collapse. I remember I had no clothes to wear just those I wore on me it was a white T-shirt which was full of yellow stains from the sweat and I couldn't go out. We didn't even have a deodorant we had no idea what a deodorant was. We'd go outdoors and the others would glare at us like saying 'where's that dirt bag going' yes that type of scene. It was only after a very long time later that we'd probably get our first deodorant and I remember that after a very long time we'd have our first deodorant and we didn't buy it, it was given to us free of charge by someone who had a mini-market below our flat he gave it to us as a gift. He'd see us going about like poor unfortunate souls and he'd think 'let me give them a deodorant' (pause). Yes (pause) indeed (as if reflecting on all that had occurred).

The houses the two women stayed in mark the impoverishment within which they would live; these become the internal space wherein social marginalization and the exclusion from elementary conditions of self-respect – such as cleanliness – are experienced, as also loneliness, fear, shame and self-pity. Such living conditions inscribe the two women

within the category of the 'human waste', as is called by Z. (Bauman, 2002, p. 81), the people, in other words, who incur the extreme conditions of human violence (Freire, 1974), those who fit all the socially determined specifications to live trapped 'in a life of toil and fear under social control' (Marcuse, 1971, p. 39), in the fringes or the basements of society.

The schools

It is the primary school that seems to be the place within which Z. becomes aware of her social 'stigma', the inferiority that sets her apart from the other children, confirming that the realization of the stigma 'is at times an experience that is incurred very abruptly on one's first day at school' (Goffman, 2001, p. 100). Z. encounters the rejection of her fellow pupils (male and female) but 'she too reflects such negation discovering that certain of her characteristics justify it' (Goffman, 2001, p. 71).

> The truth is that the sentiments were strange but I felt very much, I felt like a foreigner and felt that I wouldn't be able to match up with anyone in there. I'd see kids that were well-dressed, they had their schoolbags, they knew one another, it was the fifth grade of primary school they had already forged their own company of friends and I remember how I'd sit aside alone like a poor soul with my mom and for one thing I felt let's say shameful that I was fifth grade primary school with my mom holding my hand but then I also felt so nice because she was my only friend at that moment and my sole support.

> I remember that on the first day of school when we had started all the kids had their schoolbags to put their books in and I didn't have a schoolbag I had taken a shopping bag with me which was of course torn as it couldn't carry the books.

> I remember when we'd sit somewhere to eat at the dining table in the all-day school and everyone had their lunchboxes with food prepared by their moms with juices and all that. I remember I was the only one who never had any food and our lunch lady Mrs. Fani, we still speak, would try in some way just a bit to convince them so as to take from someone a little bit of food so as to give me as well so that my place wouldn't be empty. It was all very, but very ugly.

> I remember I was for a month without a bath I stank. I had two T-shirts one red and one white. I'd wear the red for a time and then the white and when I'd go to school there were two particular girls that would tell me 'don't you have any other clothes to wear?' One of them would tell me 'wear the red one tomorrow' and I the fool would put on the red one because it was as if I was scared of them or felt ashamed in front of them. Maybe I wanted in that way to become […] to be liked by them in other words to get them to like.

From the first day at school and thereafter, the torn plastic bag for the books, the permanent absence of a lunchbox at the all-day school and of lunch during the breaks, the alternating usage of the white and the red T-shirts as the sole clothes in her possession – all function as symbols of the social 'stigma', as signs in other words of a social identity that threatens a demeaning evaluation (Goffman, 2001; Bourdieu, 2002) within the classroom and in the school community and which thereby victimizes the subject, the latter becoming either an object of ridicule (instructions as to manner of dress on the part of her two fellow pupils) or being marginalized (the others do not speak to her and she only keeps company with her Russian fellow pupil).

The school, both as an institutional place and as a social place, becomes hostile for Z., as it fails to undertake any steps towards the 'empowerment' of the foreign pupil and her friend, such empowerment being, as defined by Paulo Freire (1974), a process

whereby people can become 'from beings for others to beings for themselves' (p. 81). Instead, the school seems to accept or to tolerate the entrenched relations of power between the indigenous and the foreigners or between the better-off and those who are poor or, at best, between the old and the newcomers, failing to undertake some initiative to correct or improve the situation, accepting in essence 'the incorporation (of the two girls) within the structure of oppression' (Freire, 1974, p. 81), which as a consequence would mean that the girls would live in the margins of the classroom and of school life. If racism is an ensemble of views and behaviours which forces people to submission simply because they belong to a distinct social category, then the school becomes the place wherein there is a lucid definition of the two categories based on which the inferior status of Z. seems to be ascribed: on the one hand, that of the poor and, on the other hand, that of the foreigners-immigrants.

Her school experiences seem to undergo a change at the higher educational levels, when she attends high school but especially so in the case of senior high school, where she encounters a different type of behaviour on the part of her teachers – they were both supportive and consoling – and which most probably gives her the courage to undertake a different biographical plan.

> Then okay as I also grew older that's to say when I then reached the third year of senior high school. Okay now I'm jumping years but generally the years were the same. In other words unemployment, difficulties, this way and that the churches helped us with food that's more or less how we survived essentially. And I recall certain times when the teachers would see me and they'd ask 'what's wrong?' they'd right away understand there was something wrong with me. I remember a missus who taught us religious studies at senior high school she'd look at me and say 'Z. what's wrong with you?' And then I had told them I can't remember who was the first teacher I'd speak to about my problem the truth is but I had spoken about it to someone and he had said it to the rest and they had agreed to help me somehow. They'd given me some money I remember. Although I was embarrassed to take it they'd given me about 300 euro. And generally they helped me. Also it was then when the kids would go on a three-day [excursion] and I couldn't go because I couldn't pay for it and they had set up a program for the kids who don't have the money to go free of charge. I was among those kids I don't know there was also another kid I don't know I never found out which kid it was. Okay I recall that this had been commented on by just one mother and she had said that it wasn't right for someone to go for free while the others paid. No one else had commented on it.

> In other words I think that through this school and this possibility of studying here it is a good way tomorrow or the day after to be able to pay back all those good things that people have done for me that helped me those years and this basically concerns mainly the teachers that helped me the teachers indeed helped me and people who simply supported us without even knowing us.

Z's course to university was eventful, as she was unsuccessful in her first attempt at passing the examinations for entrance to the university of her choice. In due course, teachers would come to assist her by offering tuition services free of charge so that she would be better prepared, and so she sat the examination a second time. This time round, she succeeded in entering university, though at a city other than her own – in a year's time, however, she managed to be transferred to the city where she stayed with her mother, Thessaloniki.

The university as bridge between the places

For Z., the university is, at the outset, the place of vindication, the place which seems to compensate for the insults, the humiliations and the degradation. Many of those who mocked her or ostentatiously ignored her have fallen behind in the race for upward social mobility, whereas she has reached a point that seems to surprise even her. Within the different courses of her life, all of which are interwoven, her subsequent success at the university seems to help her view her past, present and future in a different light.

> So instead of being for them the Albanian the […] eh […] (as if implying what she means to say) they'll treat me a bit differently.

> Alright the beautiful thing about this case is simply that I now have the Nursing School and I tell myself that soon I shall have certain […] I'll be a person of merit. Essentially I'll be able to do something and I think that nursing is a vocation. In other words to occupy yourself with human lives is very nice although it does involve responsibility. I simply think that's one way that I can pay back in return and to […] how to put it? To pay back in return for those good things done to me. In other words I think that through this School and through this capacity to be able to study here it is a good way in the future to be able to pay back all those good things that people have done for me who helped me all these years.

If, as Bourdieu (2002) states, 'the fact that a designated university degree is somewhere required may be a manner of requiring in reality a specific social origin' (p. 148), then the attainment of a specific degree may in some way make up for, at least to some extent, the absence of such origin.

The university is the place that offers Z. the most powerful but also for her the most feasible 'status symbol' and a 'sign of declassification' (Goffman, 2001, p. 113) and signifies the transition from 'the dire situation of the discredited' (Goffman, 2001, p. 66) to the situation of a person with value and hence the repositioning towards a new 'social identity' (Goffman, 2001, pp. 136, 138). At the same time, however, entrance to the university offers the capacity and opens the door to the prospect of realizing a life dream for Z., the return to the place and the space from which she started her life and her engagement with children-inmates of an institution similar to hers. The dominant form through which she understands 'the anticipated trajectory of her life' (Tsiolis, 2006, p. 68) seems to be the sense of indebtedness, a sense of moral obligation, the reciprocation for a service of fundamental significance that had been offered to her by strangers in the early years of her life. Thus, her trajectory at school and her entrance to the university seem to constitute the basic positive 'processes of social transformation' (Tsiolis, 2006, p. 61), those in other words that alter the given conditions of her life in the direction of a dynamic personal and social advancement.

The university becomes, further, the place of an overall restitution, of a 'return' to her difficult past not through a recollection of the traumatic experiences of deprivation of the paternal and maternal figure, of the tragic separations and the uprootment, but through the materialization of a circle that ensures the dedramatization, regularization and ultimately therapeutic inclusion of all the pieces of her personal life in the biographical account of herself. Achieving social and moral status via her studies, ceasing to be a mere Albanian but an Albanian where the insultingly aggressive specification ascribed to her is not uttered in the narration but is registered in the ellipses that accompany her ethnic designation, she can possess not only rights but also life dreams, as also tenable hopes that these shall be fulfilled.

The university, finally, is the place on the terrain of which Z.'s life surpasses the polarization between two extremes, that of Albania and of Greece, between the logic of

failure or that of success in the migratory undertaking (Lutz, 2010) and her reception and hence her narration is reconstructed as an 'interactive, dynamic and open process' (Lutz, 2010, p. 301), as a transnational journey through the places where she has lived and through the osmosis of their cultures. In that way, the places through which she journeyed and the experiences which were to be connected with these may be seen as sources of 'personal and social empowerment' (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1986a, p. 174; 1986b, p. 192).

Notes

[1]   The acronym AMKA is the personal number of each health-insured person in the Greek National Health System.

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Learning to live with discrimination: Experiences of two asylum seekers with misrecognition in Italy

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Abstract

Otherness is one issue that comes up when discussing migration, and when it comes to asylum seeking in Europe, the topic of discrimination is a pivotal one also due to the rise of nationalistic political parties in the last few years. This paper therefore uses narrative interviews and Axel Honneth's theory of recognition to explore the experiences of two asylum seekers with discrimination in Italy, and how they were responding to these experiences. The aim of the paper is to highlight how discrimination impacted differently on the participants' construction of self-identity and their different strategies when it comes to becoming part of the host society.

Keywords: asylum seeking, discrimination, experiential learning, misrecognition

Introduction

Before 2011, the major preoccupation of EU countries was to control undocumented migration but with the uprising in Tunisia, which started the Arab Spring, the discourse shifted from illegal or undocumented migrants to refugees and asylum seekers (Borri & Fontanari, 2017). The Tunisian situation forced many people to leave Tunisia and they headed towards Lampedusa in Italy. The EU and other European countries left Italy to deal with the problem alone. 'The Italian government decided to issue a six-month humanitarian document to all Tunisians stranded in Italy, which allowed them to freely move across the Schengen space. Many Tunisians headed to France' (Borri & Fontanari, 2017, p. 25). As a result, the French government closed its border with Italy and returned many refugees to Italy. On another front, the war in Libya in 2011, caused about 30000

people to leave. These persons also headed to Italy, and as in the Tunisian case, the EU and other countries left Italy to tackle the problem. In Italy, these refugees were not able to settle down; many of them were homeless, and after some time they moved to other parts of Europe. At this point, the refugee situation was still considered manageable, but the situation was aggravated with the Syrian civil war in 2013 and 2014 which made hundreds of thousands to head for Germany through Greece, Italy, Turkey and the Balkans. While some countries, like Macedonia and Greece, facilitated the movement of these refugees for example by proving special trains, some countries closed their borders. In fact, Hungary indicated its unwillingness to accept refugees. As the crisis was going, Germany decided to open its borders to Syrians.

The increase in the number of migrants into Europe has proved to be a political challenge to the countries of Europe (Androvičová & Bolečeková, 2019; Bartram et al., 2014; Castles, 2000, 2018; Karagiannis & Randeria, 2018). The governments of these countries have found this challenge difficult to handle. One of the reasons for this is the efforts by nationalists to make political gains from the issue of immigration. They do this by feeding on the suspicions and doubts of members of the host society by portraying migration as a challenge to national identity and cultural traditions and call for stricter immigration policies. The argument that immigration can lead to the erosion of cultural values, and thus a challenge to national identity has led to political conflicts in many European countries. Ultranationalist groups embark on campaigns to proclaim the dangers of migration. Some of the claims are: that a large number of asylum seekers refuse to return to their home countries after the rejection of their asylum application (Čáky, 2019); immigrants, particularly asylum seekers and refugees, are prone to criminality (De Coninck, 2020); the sheer number of foreigners can have a disintegrating effect on their society - migration is a threat to societal cohesion (Karagiannis & Randeria, 2018); the cultures of the host society and the migrants' society(ies) are fundamentally incompatible – for example, Muslim migrants in Europe are seen as a threat to European culture/civilisation (Bischoff, 2018; Karagiannis & Randeria, 2018). In Italy, some political parties with anti-immigration stance also sprang up, such as the Lega Nord and the Five Stars Movement. These parties claimed that Italy cannot accept all immigrants but promised to support projects that would tackle illegal migration from Africa, but these projects had to be situated in Africa and not Italy. Lega Nord went ahead to secure 17.63% in the 2018 parliamentary elections (Čáky, 2019).

There is no doubt that migration leads to some social transformations in the receiving society such as multilingualism and multiethnicity (Mecheril, 2018), and some of the concomitant challenges of immigration include the social inclusion or integration and participation of newcomers (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2017; Formenti & Luraschi, 2020; Kurantowicz et al., 2014), and the desire to make them have a sense of belongingness because of the tendency by members of the receiving society to view immigrants as foreigners, or in some cases aliens. Bischoff (2018) notes that, 'Migration is always associated with Otherness, which in turn is seen as cultural difference, and usually also as inferiority' (p. 26). In order to tackle the challenge of othering, for many authors it seems important to acknowledge differences and celebrate diversity. However, this raises many questions and even paradoxes: Who is the 'other'? And how do we construct them. The other is that subject or person who is regarded as inferior based on certain characteristics. Such a person experiences barriers to their flourishing in the society. In essence, such a person's humanity is undermined and devalued. The definition of othering by powell and Menendian (2016) as 'a set of dynamics, processes, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality across any of the full range of human differences based on group identities' (p. 17) shows that the other is constructed through

prejudice based on group identity. They point out that othering has many dimensions which include race, class, disability, sexual orientation, religion, among others.

The acknowledgment of differences and celebration of diversity might not always translate to positive experiences for migrants as it has been found out that in some societies, certain categories of immigrants (for example, those who are poor, those who lack legal permission to stay in the country, those who are under skilled, persons from certain countries or persons with different religious or ethnic backgrounds) are discriminated and live on the margins with poor opportunities for development if there are no intentional actions to counter discriminatory practices (Androvičová & Bolečeková, 2019; Portes, 2009). The question is: How does discrimination work for these migrants, notably for asylum seekers and refugees, who typically belong to the most marginalised categories (maybe not always, like the Ukrainian refugees who were received warmly by the countries of Europe)? The understanding of personal experiences and strategies can highlight the dynamics of discrimination and their consequences in terms of inclusion and well-being of migrants, but also for the ecosystemic wellbeing of the host society. Interpretative narrative inquiry can be a way to gain knowledge about the processes at micro, meso and macro levels.

This paper therefore aims to explore in depth how two asylum seekers from Nigeria have learned to cope with life in Italy. The questions I seek to elaborate in this paper include: What experiences of othering did these Black asylum seekers encounter in Italy and what coping strategies were they employing to address their experiences? Answering these questions provides new insights about how asylum seekers and refugees deal with experiences in the host society that are not only 'unpleasant' but threatening their sense of being human, their agency and their identity. In the remaining parts of this paper, I briefly discuss asylum seeking in Italy, the theory of recognition and analyse my interview materials followed by the discussion of findings.

Asylum Seeking and Integration in Italy

Italy is a popular destination for immigrants who attempt to enter Europe via the Mediterranean (Bencivenga, 2017; Dovigo, 2019; Nuzzolese & Di Vella, 2008; Paynter, 2020) but this category of desperate migrants is portrayed as undesirable elements by the Italian media (Russo et al., 2016). It is the number four country with the highest number of asylum seekers (European Commission, 2022; European Council & Council of the European Union, 2022; European Union Agency for Asylum, 2022; Eurostat, 2022). In 2021, Italy received about 45,000 applications for asylum (European Commission, 2022). Asylum seekers are expected to make their application within 8 days of arrival in Italy. A decision is expected to be made on an asylum application within 30 days but in case of complicated circumstances, the whole process can take up to six months, and if the six months deadline is not met, there is a provision for a maximum of 18 months for each asylum application to be considered. If the application is accepted, asylum is granted and the asylum seeker becomes a refugee (Russo et al., 2016).

Although Caneva (2014) claims that integration in Italy is (narrowly) conceptualised in terms of economic insertion or participation in the labour market, Scardigno (2019) however contends that Italy complies with the European Union's integration policy through actions to prioritise the active inclusion and participation of asylum seekers and refugees into the economic and social system by recognising the importance of access to education and granting recognition to qualifications acquired outside of Italy.

The procedures for the 'integration' of asylum seekers in Italy operate in three phases. The first phase entails rescue and identification. Identification is carried out by

fingerprinting and photographing the new arrivals. This happens immediately at the places of disembarkation, and it is coordinated by national authorities. This process is obligatory and hasty, and its meaning can be very obscure for the newcomer; most of them, for example, do not know about the Dublin Regulation and the fact that their pilgrimage towards asylum starts from there.

The second phase involves the accommodation of the newly arrived persons, and it is coordinated by local authorities. Accommodation can mean a lot for someone who had no appropriate clothes, food, water and medicine, and who had risked their life. However, this experience is also very hard: camps are overcrowded, poorly handled. Initial disorientation can be extreme. Food and ways of doing things are totally new and often unpleasant. Distributed accommodation in small apartments and residential centres have been dismantled in many places due to the new regulations (Formenti & Luraschi, 2020).

In the third phase, applicants for asylum and beneficiaries of asylum are involved in integration programmes such as language and vocational classes. These programmes are coordinated by municipalities and non-governmental organisations (European Social Policy Network, 2017; Ghio & Blangiardo, 2019). At each step of the process, the person is actively involved: even when they are storied as vulnerable or victims, or passive, the newcomers are attentive, strategic, more or less aware of what is going on, more or less sympathetic, demanding or dependent. Each has a story to tell, desires and hopes. So, beyond the procedure, we need to understand the process and the involved subjectivities.

The Italian situation appears overall very problematic when it comes to a real possibility for migrants' integration. I opine, based on my interviews, that while Italy has legal provisions to encourage the integration of asylum seekers and refugees into its society, these provisions do not seem to facilitate their sense of belonging. Dalziel and Piazzoli (2018) quote Catalano (2016) who paints a pessimistic picture of migrants' integration in Italy by declaring 'the systematic negative representation of migrants in Italy as a burden to Italian society' (Dalziel & Piazzoli, 2018, p. 9) that appears very reluctant to engage in any exchange or dialogue with immigrants, particularly refugees and asylum seekers. Paynter (2022) states that the widespread assumption that being economic migrants, Africans are not 'real' asylum seekers entails that that they use up resources and provisions for real asylum seekers. Russo et al. (2016) assert that the media often depicts refugees and asylum seekers in derogatory terms. Venturini and Villosio (2018) also point out that foreigners in the Italian labour market are mostly concentrated in poorly paid and low-skilled jobs, even when they possess high qualifications. This reality is described as the 'racialisation' of knowledge (Bencivenga, 2017) or 'ethnicisation' of jobs (Venturini & Villosio, 2018) with the consequence that migrants' full potentials are not valued.

Furthermore, with the enactment of the law, n. 113/2018, otherwise known as Decreto Salvini, which abolished the category of 'Humanitarian Protection', asylum seekers in Italy are no longer entitled 'to receive integration support (e.g., work orientation services, legal and psychological support)' (Bianco & Cobo, 2019, p. 3; Formenti & Luraschi, 2020). This also means that there is no longer an obligation by reception centres to provide language classes to asylum seekers. However, the law, guarantees linguistic education to minors and those who have been granted asylum (Bianco & Cobo, 2019). Bianco and Cobo (2019) also describe Italy's integration practices as assimilative due to the emphasis on acquiring Italian language in order to obtain long-term residency and Italian citizenship. They however point out that this is a feature of the EU's integration policies. It implies that language teaching for migrants, including asylum seekers and refugees, in Italy and other European countries does not

consider the linguistic needs of specific persons but is focused on preparing them for the labour market.

Learning and Migration

Kurantowicz et al. (2014) view 'migration as a process of education and learning' (p. 146). Morrice (2013) states that 'Becoming a refugee involves significant learning' (p. 267) because the individual has to learn new values, rules and behaviours. In the context of migration, (informal) learning may take place when people make sense of what they need and how to act in their new socio-cultural contexts. Most times, learning takes place as 'social learning, distributed throughout the lifeworld; it proceeds through social interaction' (Rogers, 2014, p. 41). Morrice (2011), drawing on Lave and Wenger (1991), posits that learning is a fundamental part of social interaction. Thus, as newcomers interact with members of their host society, they gain understanding of social practices, positions and roles. This explicates the connection between learning and identity. The understanding that a newcomer develops about social practices, positions and roles will contribute to how they position themselves in the host society and will determine how much they participate in it the new society.

Thunborg et al. (2021) used biographical interviews with five asylum seekers to explore how young adult asylum seekers in Sweden 'learn to belong' to their host society. They found out that some learned to be marginalised; some learned to be disconnected while others learned to be co-participants in the host society. This enlightens to us to the fact that a lot of learning that is not organised or conscious, or not desirable at all, is taking place in asylum seekers, and this kind of learning has the potential to shape the kind of self-identity asylum seekers construct and also how they perceive their host society. We can therefore conceptualise that self and identity are constructed through learning. This learning usually occurs during social encounters and interactions even in formal learning situations, and when it is integrated into a person's biography, it can lead to a transformation in the person's identity (Morrice, 2011), and as mentioned above concerning the study by Thunborg et al. (2021), learning is not always positive, as their study result shows that some asylum seekers learned to be marginalised or disconnected.

The type of learning explained in the preceding paragraphs can be described as experiential learning. Experiential learning is 'the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience' (D. A. Kolb, 1984, p. 41). Jacobs (1999) cited in Gross & Rutland (2017) describes experiential learning as the construction of knowledge from direct experiences. Thus, experience is central to learning from the perspective of experiential learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; D. A. Kolb, 1984, 2014). Kolb (1984) identifies three models of experiential learning: The Lewin's Model, Dewey's Model and Piaget's Model. The Lewinian Model is described as a 'model of action research and laboratory training' (Kolb, 1984, p. 21). In the Lewinian Model, learning is seen regarded as an integrated process that involves here-and-now concrete experience and feedback. The here-and-now concrete experience entails identifying learning from personal experience and subjectivity in assigning meaning. Feedback refers to a problem-solving process encompassing assessing information received from observations and reflections in order to identify any departure from expected goals. The feedback received determines what happens next in the learning process.

Dewey's model shares many similarities with Lewin's model but according to Kolb (1984), Dewey makes 'the developmental nature of learning [...] by describing how learning transforms the impulses, feelings and desires of concrete experience into higher-

order purposeful action' (p. 22). Dewey thus views learning as a process of integrating experience, observation and action. Piaget outlines four stages of cognitive growth from childhood to infancy. The first stage is the sensory-motor stage (0-2 years). The second stage is the representational stage (2-6 years). The third stage is the concrete operations stage (7-11 years). The fourth and final stage is the formal operations stage (starts between 12 and 15 years). The sensory-motor stage is characterised by learning through feeling, touching and handling. In the representational stage, the child starts to manipulate objects as they develop their ability for reflection. In the concrete operations stage, the child's capacity for abstract and inductive reasoning starts to develop. In the formal operations stage which starts with the arrival of adolescence, the individual is able to carry out hypothetico-deductive reasoning and test their theories.

Kolb and Kolb (2005, p. 194) and D. A. Kolb (1984, pp. 26-38) identify six propositions on which the theory of experiential learning is predicated:

(a) Learning is best conceived as a process
(b) All learning is relearning
(c) Learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world
(d) Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world
(e) Learning results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment
(f) Learning is the process of creating knowledge

The theory of experiential learning has given rise to a number of programmes or learning designs or teaching styles such as industrial trainings, internships, role plays, field trips, games, simulation tasks, case studies, etc. (Bélanger, 2011; Gross & Kelman, 2017). While these learning designs, which entail planned and active engagement with the learning process, have taken the spotlight, experiential learning also accounts for learning that takes place from unplanned experiences and reflection on such experiences, which is the focus of this article. The approach in this paper is that experiential learning refers to insights that the research participants developed as a result of their experiences. How did their experiences of certain encounters shape their attitudes and actions? These experiences could be from formal education contexts or informal day-to-day contexts. Bélanger (2011) states that reflexivity is important for experiential learning to take place. Thus, experiential learning involves subjectivity and reflection. The individual reflects on their experience and from their reflection, they develop new knowledge or attitude or course of action in relation to a particular situation (Dervin, 2017; Weiland, 1981). Bélanger (2011) points out that not all experience leads to learning, rather learning takes place only when the individual has reflected on and transformed their experience into new knowledge that will be useful in the future.

In the latter part of this paper, I will show how my participants learned to cope with discrimination and racism, and how their strategies affected the construction of a migrant's identity. The focus of this paper is on experiential learning in any context, including formal education contexts.

The Contribution of the Theory of Recognition to Self-Identity

Axel Honneth's theory (Honneth, 1995) explains that intersubjective recognition shapes how people build their self-identity. When a person receives recognition from other people, the person develops a healthy sense of self. Intersubjective recognition is

manifested in three spheres (Fleming, 2011b, 2011a; Fleming & Finnegan, 2014a, 2014b; Honneth, 1995; West, 2014; West et al., 2013).

The first sphere, love, is characterised by subjects' dependence on each other; encouragement or affective approval are important. Essentially, individuals recognise each other as needy creatures and feel accepted by the other person when their needs are satisfied. Honneth claims that the sphere of love is 'both conceptually and genetically prior to every other form of reciprocal recognition' (Honneth, 1995, p. 107) because it is in this sphere of recognition that individuals develop basic self-confidence.

The second sphere of recognition refers 'only to the situation in which self and other respect each other as legal subjects for the sole reason that they are both aware of the social norms by which rights and duties are distributed in their community' (Honneth, 1995, pp. 108–109). People should be seen as morally responsible persons with rights and capability to participate in societal affairs. The ability to exercise one's rights is what develops an individual's self-respect because it empowers the individual who bears rights to 'engage in action that can be perceived by interaction partners' (Honneth, 1995, p. 120).

The third sphere of recognition, social esteem, concerns the full manifestation of a person's traits and abilities. When an individual's uniqueness and contribution to society are recognised, Honneth (1995) points out that such recognition helps the individual to develop their self-esteem.

When a person is denied recognition, their self-identity is injured (Honneth, 1995). This underscores how humans need recognition from others in order to develop healthy self-identity. Honneth locates misrecognition or disrespect in the three spheres of recognition. He argues that social or structural exclusion of persons is misrecognition (disrespect) in the sphere of rights, and damages a person's self-respect. Experiences of misrecognition can lead to a struggle for recognition whereby individuals seek redress for their situation. Honneth's attempt in developing the theory of recognition is to advance the concept of the 'ethical life'. This concept of ethical life, according to him, refers to all the conditions that are necessary for an individual to develop a good self-identity. The ethical life can be identified in 'a society in which the universalistic achievements of equality and individualism would be so embedded in patterns of interaction that all subjects would be recognized as both autonomous and individuated, equal and particular persons' (Honneth, 1995, p. 175). So, the ethical society is the society where conditions for self-realisation for everyone are present.

Some adult education scholars have written about the place of recognition in adult learning. In his theoretical reflection on the Fraser-Honneth debate, Huttunen (Huttunen, 2007) states that the task of adult education is to promote a society where love, caring and reciprocal recognition exist, allowing everyone to be able to develop a healthy relation to self and work towards self-realisation and flourishing. He thus advocates for spaces where people can experience love, care and respect in order to develop a healthy self-esteem. West (2014) shows how care and concern shown by significant others can contribute to an individual's self-development. He demonstrated how the feeling of being seen and valued by others, through the forging of caring relationships can help a person to overcome self-doubts, gain self-confidence and become more agentic. West et al. (2013) also argue that acceptance by others can enhance students' self-confidence while the feeling of being granted the status of a student with the same rights as other students can improve a person's self-respect. Sandberg and Kubiak (2013) explored the place of Honneth's recognition theory in the processes and practices of *recognition of prior learning* (RPL) by studying the experiences of paraprofessional workers in health and social care in the UK and Sweden. They claim that by making all learning experiences

(including non-formal and informal) visible and recognised, RPL can improve self-awareness, self-confidence and self-esteem. Thus, RPL has the potential to contribute to a person's healthy self-identity (Sandberg & Kubiak, 2013).

Methodology and Context

In this study, I adopted a narrative method in which narratives were provoked, then analysed and interpreted in order to arrive at a deep and critical understanding (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020). The narrative interview provides rich materials about the experiences of participants, or better put, their narrative construction of experience, because they are able to talk about what is most important to them without being stopped. Throughout the study, I tried to take into account that when telling their stories, participants choose what to reveal and what to omit due to some reasons (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020; Formenti, 2014; West, 1996). Part of the reasons include: the sentiments attached to the story being told, for instance, if the story brings back pleasant or painful memories (West, 1996); besides, the interview context shapes the interviewee's narrative (Galimberti, 2014). That is, the interviews I held were co-constructions of reality between the participants and myself (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1989, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 2003, 2013). Another important point to take into consideration is that stories tell much more than what appears at their surface, and they do not explain themselves alone. This is why the interpretation of participants' narratives is crucial (Merrill & West, 2009) The interpretation was subjective since I interpreted the narratives through my experiences – not least, my own status as a Nigerian PhD student in Italy – and what I thought the participants were communicating (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

I transcribed the interviews in full and I made no attempt to make the participants' expressions grammatically correct. Three dots indicate pauses while shortened speech are indicated by four dots. Italics were used when the participant was reporting someone else's speech. Words in parentheses are my explanations of non-English words. Quotations in Nigerian Pidgin English were translated. Bold font was used to indicate my words or the questions I asked. Participants' names have been anonymised for confidentiality. Being a qualitative study, this research does not aim at representativeness or generalisation but at 'resonance, plausibility, moral persuasiveness and explanatory power' (West, 1996).

The analysis in this paper did not start when I started writing the paper. It started immediately after my first interview for my PhD project. Thus, it was recursive. While returning from each of my interviews, I would think about what I had heard, and try to make sense of it. After extensive careful considerations of the transcripts, I identified themes that ran across all my interviews. I then went ahead to create categories for emerging themes in the stories. I found similar categories in the stories of the two participants selected for this paper. I found in the participant's stories that they were learning how that they were learning that misrecognition was part of their reality as black asylum seekers in Italy. Their stories also revealed how they were learning to respond to these experiences of misrecogntion.

Participants

For my whole, project, I interviewed ten (10) asylum seekers/refugees, three (3) CPIA teachers, one (1) social worker who is Italian, one (1) camp operator who is Nigerian and one (1) other person who is the president of the association of Nigerians in Milan. In this paper, the narratives of two asylum seekers are presented in this paper because their

interviews revealed instances of discrimination and their strategies for coping with these experiences. The participants were asylum seekers from Nigeria. They were both living in the Lombardy region of Italy. My interviews with the participants took place in Standard English and Nigerian Pidgin English. Nigerian Pidgin English is a blend of English words and local words from Nigerian languages, so most people in Nigeria, regardless of their educational status, can speak Pidgin English. The participants and I switched between Standard English and Pidgin English throughout the interviews. It is important to point out that while speaking standard English, their statements were most times not grammatically correct, but they are presented verbatim in order to preserve their voice. Below are short portraits of the participants.

Analysis

Steve

Steve, who was in his late twenties, came to Italy in May 2017. He arrived in the South of Italy and was later transferred to Lombardy. His immediate goals after arriving in Italy were to get a job by the end of 2017 and learn the language. His motivation to learn Italian was fuelled by the need to get a job and to communicate with people. He got a job before the end of 2017 and since then he had been combining schooling and working. While in middle school, he and one of his teachers, a White Italian lady, started a romantic relationship. He was working as a security guard at the time of the interview. Apart from his regular job as a security guard, he also worked as a mediator/interpreter for other Nigerians because of his ability to speak Italian. I interviewed Steve in a public park in company of his girlfriend. The interview lasted for almost two hours. Steve felt that while life for a Black person in Italy was difficult, things were more difficult for asylum seekers from Nigeria.

Charles

Charles was in his mid-twenties and he came to Italy in 2016. After the success of his asylum application, he went to Belgium. He came back to Italy because of a particular document he needed, and planned to return to Belgium as soon as he got the document. He had found it difficult to get a satisfactory job since he returned to Italy. At the time of the interview, he was working with a food delivery company, where he delivered food using his bicycle. I interviewed Charles in his house. The interview lasted for one hour. Throughout the interview, he was critical about life in Italy. He alleged that Italy was the most racist country in Europe. He expressed the view that Italy was a difficult place for Black people to live.

Encounters with discrimination

Both Steve and Charles recounted experiences of discrimination in Italy. Their accounts reveal that discrimination exists in different segments of the society in Lombardy, Italy. For example, formal learning environments, workplace and government institutions. Steve narrated some experiences of discrimination he had in language class and in middle school. He remembered a particular teacher in middle school who used racial slurs when students argued with her. He also recalled that he was stereotyped by a particular teacher in language class:

> …. And then when I got there… I got into class the very first day, what the teacher… the first thing the teacher asked me was "*Where are you from*?" and I said Nigeria, and she said, "*Okay. You can sit in the very last seat in the class.*"

> Because you were a Nigerian?

> Yeah, because, "*I know after a few months you will run away like every other Nigerian.*" I said, "*Okay*" and I stayed there for… from October till January. In January, I had the exam, the final exams and I scored 92/97. I came out as the best student in the class and she was like "*No, no, I didn't expect this from you, above all you are a Nigerian.*" And I said, "*Yes, that reminds me of what you said to me the very first day, and that's part of my determination.*" She said, "*No, no, I never said anything like that.*" I said "*Okay, maybe there was a little bit of misunderstanding but this is what I understood at first*" and she said "*No, no, I'm sorry if you understood tha*t." And that was it. So, she asked me to continue studying, like she sees that I'm a very bright person. So, I should go forward and she helped me fill the entrance form for the scuola media (middle school).

Steve stated that such an experience could be discouraging for students. His narration shows discrimination in a place where migrants should find hope. Formenti and West (2018) suggest that educators should create environments where learners feel valued. The territorial centres of adult education have immigrants as the majority of their students, and one would expect persons who work with migrants to be circumspect in relating with this category of people. The language teacher's action reported by Steve is a typical example of othering: a categorisation of the other based on his origin. It is racist. Eschenbacher (2020) suggests that educators who work with migrants should adopt a supportive attitude and Wildemeersch (2017) urges educators to show respect for migrant learners. However, we must understand that these processes are not rationally implemented or chosen, and most teachers in these centres do not perceive themselves as racist (Oshodi, 2021).

Steve also narrated that he had experienced and witnessed discrimination on the street and in the workplace. He said Italians would hold their bags and wallets tight when they saw him. He also narrated that in the supermarket where he worked as a security guard, his boss would tell him to keep an eye on Black people who came to shop and that despite expressing his displeasure at what he considered racism, the situation persisted. He found himself in a quandary: if he refused to follow his boss' orders, it would appear that he was slacking in his duties, and to focus his gaze on Black shoppers was psychologically disturbing for him:

> …. Where I dey now wok, we dey use am get problem well well for there. Bikos I dey tell my capo go say, "If na so una tek dey wok here, me I no fit dey do am bikos dis one dey affect me personally and psychologically. How you go see guys, bikos sey dem be Africans, dey just enta here una begin follow dem up and down? Then you now as a capo, you dey call me sey mek I dey follow dem up and down...."

> (Translation): Where I work now, this has caused problems a lot because I tell my boss that, "If this is how you di here, I can't join you to do it because it affects me personally and psychologically. Why will you be monitoring people because they are Africans? Then, you are also asking me to follow them around" (Author's own translation).

> I: Dem dey call too?

> S: Yes now. By di time I no do dat one wey you dey tell me, e go kon be like sey I no know how to do my job. Whereas na you dey impose your racism put for my bodi

(Translation): Yes. If I don't do what you tell me, it will look as if I can't do my job but the fact is that you are forcing me to be racist (Author's own translation).

To do it against my fellow people

Yeah, against my will. Na hin I kon tel sey, "If me I no dey wok for here, by di time I enta here, na di same tin. So, me, personally, I no fit do dis kain wok." E say, no, no, no mek I no worry sey dem go resolve am, dem go resolve am. Little, little, maybe a day or two, e go still change but di third day, di same tin go still happen.

(Translation): Yes, against my will. That is why I told him that, "If I didn't work here and I entered this place, you would do the same thing to me. I can't do this type of work." He said, no and asked me not to worry as they would resolve the situation. There would be a change for maybe a day or two but by the third day, the same thing will repeat itself.

In the extract above, Charles recounted how his boss' order was making him act against his will, and despite his protestations, the situation did not change. He narrated that he was always at loggerheads with his boss because of his opposition to be asked to monitor Black shoppers.

While Charles commented that he had not experienced discrimination in language class, he however claimed that racism was rife in Italy. Charles argued that racism was a systemic issue in Italy:

Italy is a country whereby, definitely, the way they treat Black are not the same way they treat White. Italy… I can say some of part… let me not use this word. Some part of Italy… maybe… I've never seen a Black man driving a public bus in Italy. I've never seen a Black man driving train in Italy. So… but in other country where I have step my foot, I've seen a Black man working but they discriminate a lot. Italy is the most racist country in Europe.

But about racism, yeah, I could say Italy is the most racist country. I'm not saying it because… because… I'm not saying it because I'm in Italy. Errr… I said it because I have travelled. I have the experience. If I've not travelled, I've travel almost getting to four to five countries in Europe. I got the experience. I have it. I see it. I see it. Let me use an example of this now: In Italy, in Italy, in Milano here, you find… find it difficult to give a Black man a house, to rent. I've went for a place to look for a house, and the woman told me wholeheartedly… I cannot remember the place again, somewhere in Monza. Ooh (hisses). I told my commercialista the day he came to register me about this thing, emergency something. I told him the woman told me, *"As far as you are a Black man, I can't give you my house to rent. I can't give you."* But few… some of them are good o. some of Italians are good. Some of Italians are good. You can't say bad of everybody. As far… even some Blacks are bad. Some Whites are bad… some Whites are bad too. You cannot just say everybodies are good, no. You cannot say everybodies are good, no. Some of them are good. Some of them are bad. But when you meet the bad person, that's your bad experience. So, when you meet a good person, that's your good experience, a good part of it. So, that is it. That is it.

Charles contended that Black persons experienced a lot of suffering and discrimination in Italy. He also suggested that there was a stereotyping of Blacks.

…I went to questura (the immigration desk at the police station) here in Lecco one day. I saw many Black crying, frustrating. I went to interpret one… for one guy. They are crying. All their requirement they need is there but what is the problem? Why did they not give them what they need? That's the question. Because a Black man. A White man can see you, you are standing with a White man… errr… as a Black man, a White man can see you are standing with a White man, they will first of all choose a White man before you. It happened to me when I went to interpret something for this boy here. They will choose a White man.

You came before him o. They say no discrimination. A controller will see you inside train. A controller will see you inside train. He will leave the White man and come and control you as a Black ma because you are sitting there. "*Bolieto, bolieto*" (train ticket) (laughs loudly). My God! Yeee! Black man don suffer. "*Bolieto*." I'm not saying this because I want to… That is my experience. I have experienced it severally. He will leave the White guys there and come and control you as a Black man.

Charles described how Black persons are stereotyped as wanting to avoid paying for transportation and are thus subjected to extra scrutiny on the train. The experience of stereotyping is evident in the narratives of both Steve and Charles. The tendency to stereotype immigrants has been pointed out by Bischoff (2018) and Karagiannis and Randeria (2018). For example, in some European countries, there are attempts by anti-immigration campaigners to establish links between Islam and terrorism on one hand, and Islam and the erosion of the culture of the host society on the other hand (Čáky, 2019). Some people also associate Black immigrants with dangerous and criminal behaviour (Paynter, 2022), and Kansteiner (2018) points out that despite the fact there is no sufficient evidence to support the stereotyping of immigrants, changing negative public opinion about migration and immigrants is difficult because, 'Collective memories are not based in fact; they are based in stories, images, and feelings' (p. 142).

Charles also described how discrimination affects Black people's employment chances and prospects. He spoke about how some of his friends experienced downward mobility because they had to take jobs below their qualification. It is difficult to understand his friends' level of education as he could not differentiate among a medical degree, PhD and bachelor's degree. This is probably due to the fact that Charles had little education and did not understand the different types or levels of university qualifications. He seemed convinced though that these friends were underemployed because their educational certificates were from Africa. The literature on migration has identified that migrants from developing countries face difficulties transferring their education and skills to developed countries (Morrice et al., 2017; Slade, 2008):

S: I have a doctor… I have a friend, he is a doctor, a doctor degree in Nigeria. He graduated. I saw it. I saw him. What's he doing here? Is it not a fabbrica (factory) work? But he went there to apply (Sneers again)

I: He has a PhD or he is a medical doctor?

S: A medical doctor. BXC

I: Okay, he has B.Sc.?

S: He has B.Sc. in Nigeria.

I: Oh, B.Sc.? Okay

S: B.Sc. but he doesn't use it here

I: Oh, okay

S: So that is it now. That is it. You know…

I: Medical doctor?

S: He's a medical doctor. Should I call him now?

I: Why didn't he go to another country to do something else?

S: You ask me, who I'm going to ask, bro? Let's move forward. Let's move forward, bro. Let's move forward. I have a friend… I still have a friend in Ancona. He's a graduate, B.Sc. graduate but I don't know what he read. He's a B.Sc. graduate. I know him right from childhood. I don't know what he's doing in Ancona right now.

Charles' inability to clarify his friend's qualification notwithstanding, he was convinced that his friend was working in a job below his qualification. He even offered to call him so I could confirm the truth of his claim from this friend. Guo (2014) has written that some immigrants from the global South in Canada experience downward social mobility because they have to make major shifts from the jobs they were doing in their home countries to entirely different sectors in the host country. Some highly skilled immigrants even have to take casual and part-time jobs making them unemployed and underutilised.

Charles also mentioned a shocking experience he had while looking for a job:

I went to look for work in a restaurant. The man look at me, say, *"Oh, ciao."* Say, *"Parla Italiano bene. Eh! Eh!"* He say, *"You speak good Italian."* When I gave her my curriculum, I turn back, he throw my curriculum into a dustbin. I turn my back. I went to the dustbin where he took… where he kept my curriculum. I pick up my curriculum and I left the… the hotel. You neva see anytin. You've not seen anything in Italy. We have so many things to say. We have so many things to say but Africans are not like this. In Africa, they can't treat a White man like this. They will give you escort. They will carry police. They will give you police. They will be guarding you. But here, they will treat you like trash, according to Donald Trump. He call Africa shithole. They call you shithole here but we are struggling. We will survive (laughs). We are trying our best, you know. That's it. we will survive. That's it.

Common restaurant work, they are discriminating you, looking down on you that you can't work there as a Black man. Okay, if an example… just use your leg, start walking in errr… in Milan. Start walking… Just walk with your foot. Go to restaurant by restaurant. You can only see few Black people working in a bar. Few. It could be only one person you will see in a big restaurant. Only one person. The rest will be in the kitchen so that White men will not stop coming to the restaurant. Your capo will tell you to be in the kitchen, *"Don't come outside o."* So that he will not lose his client.

Charles highlights how it can be difficult for a Black person to get jobs in Italy, particularly jobs that require workers to interact with customers. He argues that business owners are afraid that employing Black workers may lead to loss of customers. Charles is not only showing how difficult it is to get a decent job, but the disrespect and racism that are experienced regularly by Black persons. The fear of losing customers is another demonstration that racism is systemic, otherwise, there would be no problem.

Both participants constructed experiences of othering in the form of discrimination. Their narratives reveal discrimination in different settings in the society such formal education setting, workplace and on public transport. The participants demonstrated that they had been learning that othering is rampant in Italy. In fact, Charles makes an emphatic declaration that Italy is the most racist country in Europe based on his personal experiences. While the participants might not be aware of the concepts of recognition and misrecognition, what their narratives reveal are experiences of misrecognition, since discrimination is a type of misrecognition (Fleming, 2022). Misrecognition takes place when a person is denied the respect or rights that they are entitled to as a morally responsible human being.

Learning to Cope with Discrimination: Reactions and Strategies

In their narrations, Steve and Charles talked about how they dealt or were dealing with experiences of discrimination in Italy. Steve spoke about using those experiences as motivation or impetus to succeed in formal education and as a way to prove those who had written him off wrong. In describing his experience with the teacher who asked him to go and sit at the back of the class, Steve used the metaphor of football. He likened the teacher's words to a ball which was passed to him, and that he as a good player took the ball and made it his own. In other words, the teacher's words served as motivation for him to do well and prove her wrong:

> That is wat I'm saying. Like the first time I got to CPIA just the same way a teacher said to me "*I know you are a Nigerian and after a few months, you are going to run away.*" When… Those words came to me like a ball but then just like a good player, I knew how to take the ball and make it mine but there are some other people that that ball could also go to and they will lose balance and then lose everything, lose focus of what they are really doing. And then there comes the question, "*What am I really doing in this school if the teacher said this? Okay, they all know that Nigerians don't come to school, so what am I doing here? Let me follow the way of Nigerians.*" So that's it.

Steve stated that he reminded the teacher of her prediction on his first day of class. He also expressed hope that his success could contribute to changing the perception of Italians about Nigerians in Italy:

> …. Practically, let me tell you one secret. This is a secret: if you are in Italy and you're Black, you're French. Other countries don't exist. Other languages don't exist unless you tell them "*No, I'm Nigerian, I speak English.*" You speak "*English?*" Quindi, and then when you tell them I speak English, they will ask you again, "*You studied in English?*" "*Yes, I studied in English. Why does it sound so strange?*" "*No*, b*ecause a lot of Africans don't speak English. And then a lot of Nigerians here too… Because we know Nigerians that take Libya to come into Italy are many times, most of the times are the cultists, armed robbers, those ones that, 'Hmm, Nigeria. I can't make a way. I can't make a living anymore for myself here. So let me go somewhere where it's a little bit easier.'*" But what we are trying to like… personally, what I am trying to change is to make these people understand that in every 100 of these people that come to Italy after creating trouble in Africa, there are also about 10, 20 good ones that are ready to learn the language, bring their head down, create a future for themselves here. So that's it.

It seemed this strategy was already working out for Steve. He had been able to establish relationships with Italians. He did extremely well in the language class which caught the attention of one of the teachers, and they started a romantic relationship. He also started a friendship with an Italian classmate:

> The relationship between Africans and Italians is that, these people, the Italians, they kind of see how good you are like in studying, they tend to… because they tend to like people that tend to study a lot. They see you that you have a lot of… you want to… you have many goals that you like to achieve and you are working towards it… Even, there is one of this… the man has… he is 52 years old, we are still friends till today. Like we are friends till today. We… He sends me… At Christmas, he sends me gifts, all that. We were really close, we were really friends, but there was this other Italian, that in Italian, "*Cosi, cosi*" … .

Formal education was important to Steve. It was his strategy for dealing with the negativities and difficulties he was experiencing in Italy. Steve revealed that his desire to

make his father proud was one of the reasons he was determined to make a success of himself.

> I've always done this. I don't know how I even cope. I don't know how I cope but I've always… it has always been this way. That's why I was talking about determination. If you think money is important to you… When I… money is important to me too, yeah because my family is not the family of Buhari. I'm not from a wealthy family but my dad has always done everything possible to send us to school. Okay, and when I came to Italy, money is important for me too but why don't I just make my father proud because he has always done everything to send me to school. And since I have the opportunity to work and school because in Nigeria, practically you don't have the opportunity to work and school unless you are in the university. Here I can do the high school, even middle school with work at the same time. That's what I have been doing since 2018. So, it depends on your determination. If you are determined that you want to do this, it works out without you even stressing. Believe me, there are going to be times of stress. There are going to be times when you say, "*Right now, I'm going to give up. I'm not going to do this anymore*" but at the end of everything you find out that life just goes on. That's what I think. So, life just goes on. Working and schooling…

Before my interview with Charles started, he had told me that he wanted to get a particular document in Italy and would return to Belgium where he had lived for some time after his asylum application was approved. While still living in Italy, Charles's narrative revealed his response to his experiences in Italy. He mentioned the acceptance of the reality of discrimination but then he also mentioned that he could be combative on some occasions:

> We don't get angry. We are used to it (laughs loudly). We are used to it. And anyone that confront you, you give him a dirty slap, then police will come.

> Lo so. Lo so. I know all these thing. Me, I don't take it from them. Anyone that confront me, I beat him.

> No. I beat him. When I beat him, the police will come. It's in the law. You don't have anyone… You don't have no right to harass me. Don't trek on my fundamental human right. Don't try it.

Charles seemed to have different responses than Steve to experiences of discrimination based on the circumstance. He seemed not to be bothered about subtle racism – which Paynter (2022) agrees is present in Italy – as he had come to terms with it, but he stated that he could be confrontational if he experienced glaring racism like being singled out for checks by a ticket controller on the train.

Discussion

The narratives of Steve and Charles reveal experiences of othering in the form of stereotyping and discrimination. They both narrated personal experiences as well as general observations of discrimination that Black persons experience in Italy. It seemed because of their experiences, the participants had built their identities as outsiders in Italy and are finding it difficult to have a sense of belonging. Morrice (2013) calls this learning to be who and what they are not. From their narrations, both participants learned that they did not have the same rights as citizens of the host community, though their responses to their experiences differ. While Steve seemed intent on integrating into the society, and develops a theory of what Italians expect, Charles seems angrier, not interested in

integration, and in fact would appreciate finding his way out of Italy. In the words of Thunborg et al. (2021), Steve was learning to be a co-participant in the Italian society while Charles was learning to be disconnected. The participants' narrations of experiences offer several clues of misrecognition, disrespect and social injustice.

Honneth (2004) argues that 'the experience of social injustice is always measured in terms of the withholding of some recognition held to be legitimate' (p. 352). The participants' narratives reveal discrimination of Black persons taking place in almost every aspect of the society. It is instructive to note that except for Steve's experiences of discrimination in formal learning situations, where his status as an asylum seeker was obvious, the participants' other experiences of discrimination were not because of their residency status in Italy but because of the colour of their skin. One could argue that because of their status as asylum seeker and refugee they did not have enough social capital to seek redress where possible, and this might be why Charles felt physical confrontation was a last resort.

Steve's strategy of coping with discrimination was to do well academically and endear himself to Italians. His view was that if Italians saw someone who was serious with their academics, they would show acceptance to such a person. Paynter (2022) describes this attitude as proving one's deservingness of social belonging. While Paynter studied how asylum seekers in Italy conduct and comport themselves in order to gain favour with Italians with the hope of receiving a positive consideration of their asylum application, her study shows that asylum seekers adopt strategies to earn the approval of Italians. One of such strategies is the demonstration of their willingness and commitment to be integrated into the Italian culture or 'performing a kind of model citizenship' (Paynter, 2022, p. 9). Steve constructed an identity of an eager individual who wanted to feel a sense of belonging in the host society. Eschenbacher (2020) states that in the bid to fit into the host society, migrants develop a self or an identity to meet the expectations of the receiving society. Steve's statements also reveal his epistemic self which is that he believed that Italians would look favourably on an outsider, not least a Black person, who appeared serious about acquiring education and making a success of themselves. All this gives us an insight into how Steve was learning how to cope with life in Italy.

There seems to be a glimpse of recognition in Steve's narration. He stated that he struck a friendship with an Italian classmate, and he also mentioned that his girlfriend was one of his Italian teachers in middle school. On the surface, this seems like recognition in the first sphere of recognition identified by Honneth but a more critical look at Steve's relationship with his girlfriend can throw up some interesting considerations. One could wonder about the dynamics of power and intersubjective recognition in their relationship. One can also ask: Is interracial marriage a demonstration of integration?

While Steve's coping strategy was to prove his deservingness (Paynter, 2022), Charles seems to have different strategies: acceptance, escape or confrontation. His acceptance of the reality of discrimination in Italy informed his decision to leave Italy as soon as he could. Tuckett (2018) cited in Formenti and Luraschi (2020) asserts that the discrimination migrants face in Italy shapes and fuels their decision to leave the country. Charles also did not rule out confrontation in some situations. Honneth (1995) argues that experiences of misrecognition can lead to resistance and even societal conflicts. According to him, when individuals' experiences of misrecognition become typical for a whole group, then the group begins a collective struggle for recognition. This is usually in the form of restitution or correction for the disrespect they are experiencing. Thus, according to Honneth, the theory of recognition 'suggests the view that motives for social resistance and rebellion are formed in the context of moral experiences stemming from

the violation of deeply rooted expectations regarding recognition' (Honneth, 1995, p. 163). Charles constructed an identity of a 'nonconformist' who though accepted the reality of discrimination in Italy but refused to submit to it.

Implicit in the reactions of both Steve and Charles is a search for recognition. Steve seemed to have learned that a way to receive recognition is to prove his 'worthiness' to Italians while for Charles, he seemed to have learned that he was never going to be accorded the recognition he deserved in Italy. He had decided that leaving Italy for another country in Europe would bring him the recognition he deserved. Thus, he was intent on searching for recognition outside the shores of Italy.

Conclusion

In this paper I explored how two asylum seekers from Nigeria learned to live with discrimination in Italy. I have shown their strategies for coping with discrimination through rich data obtained from using a narrative approach. The participants' stories reveal mainly experiences of misrecognition in encounters between Black asylum seekers and Italians in Italy. There are however glimpses of recognition, for example, the opportunity to access formal education. Most of the instances of misrecognition seem to be located in the second sphere of recognition identified by Axel Honneth; the sphere of rights. Recognition in the sphere of rights, according to Honneth, means every individual deserves to be regarded as a morally responsible person who is equal to others and have the same rights as others. The participants' narrations revealed that the two participants had learned to respond to experiences of discrimination in different ways. While the participants' experiences were not solely because of their status as asylum seekers but because of their racial background, I argue that their residency status might not give them the leverage or social capital to resist discrimination legally. This is because asylum seekers usually try to not to be careful not to jeopardise their asylum application as Paynter (2022) has pointed out. As a Black student in Italy, I have had course to make formal complaints about discrimination and this was expeditiously dealt with by the authorities. This appears not to be the case from my interactions with asylum seekers. Thus, making me feel that despite my racial background, I am more privileged than asylum seekers with the same racial background. Therefore, while race might play greater role in the experiences of discrimination that asylum seekers encounter, their social standing as persons of the margins of the society may contribute to making their situation more precarious.

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The author declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship or publication of this article.

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Aims & Scope

The European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults (RELA) is a refereed academic journal creating a forum for the publication of critical research on adult education and learning. It has a particular focus on issues at stake for adult education and learning in Europe, as these emerge in connection with wider international and transnational dynamics and trends. Such a forum is important at a time when local and regional explorations of issues are often difficult to foreground across language barriers. As academic and policy debate is increasingly carried out in the English language, this masks the richness of research knowledge, responses and trends from diverse traditions and foci. The journal thus attempts to be linguistically 'open access'. Whilst creating a forum for international and transnational debate, contributions are particularly welcome from authors in Europe and other locations where English is not the first language.

RELA invites original, scholarly articles that discuss the education and learning of adults from different academic disciplines, perspectives and traditions. It encourages diversity in theoretical and methodological approach and submissions from non-English speakers. All published contributions in RELA are subjected to a rigorous peer review process based on two moments of selection: an initial editorial screening and a double-blind review by at least two anonymous referees. Clarity and conciseness of thought are crucial requirements for publication.

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