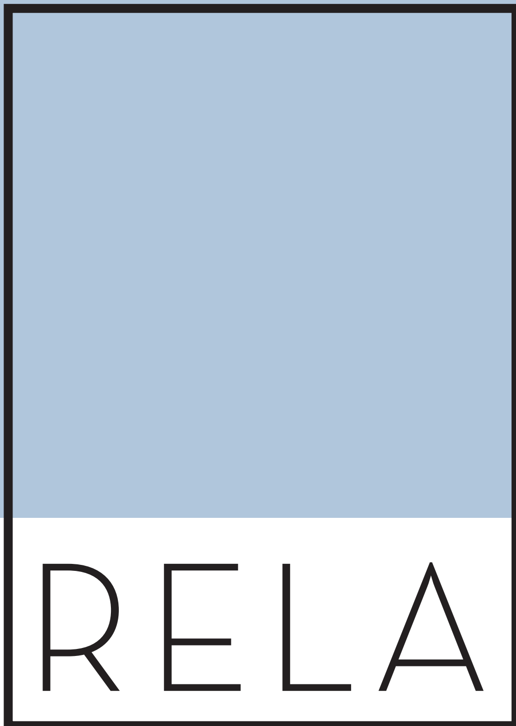
Open issue



European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults

2025, Vol. 16, No. 1

RELA

European Journal for Research
on the Education and Learning of Adults

Volume 16, No. 1, February 2025

Linköping University Electronic Press
ISSN 2000-7426
www.rela.ep.liu.se

Editorial board

Editors/Editorial group

Professor Andreas Fejes, Linköping University, Sweden, andreas.fejes@liu.se

Dr. António Fragoso, University of Algarve, Portugal

Associate professor Fergal Finnegan, Maynooth University, Ireland

Professor Ewa Kurantowicz, University of Lower Silesia, Poland

Dr. Barbara Merrill, University of Warwick, England

Professor Silke Schreiber-Barsch, University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany

Editorial assistants

Minna Levin, Linköping University, Sweden, minna.levin@liu.se

Andreas Ruschkowski, Linköping University, Sweden, andreas.ruschkowski@liu.se

Natalia Tomczyk Lövfors, Linköping University, Sweden, natalia.tomczyk@liu.se

Frej Westberg, Linköping University, Sweden, frej.westberg@liu.se

Consulting editors

Peter Alheit, Freelance, Germany
Per Andersson, Linköping University, Sweden
Paul Belangér, Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada
Gert Biesta, Brunel University London, UK
Ellen Boeren, University of Edinburgh, UK
Agnieszka Bron, Stockholm University, Sweden
Adrianna Nizinska, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
Darlene Clover, University of Victoria, Canada
Jim Crowther, University of Edinburgh, UK
Regina Egetenmeyer, University of Würzburg, Germany
Maren Elfert, King's College, UK
Jérôme Eneau, University of Rennes, France
Leona English, St. Francis Xavier University, Canada
Rob Evans, University of Magdeburg, Germany
Francoise Laot, Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne, France
Laura Formenti, University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy
Maria Gravani, Open university of Cyprus, Cyprus
Anke Grotlüschen, University of Hamburg, Germany
Bernie Grummel, Maynooth University, Ireland
Patricia Gouthro, Mount St Vincent University, Canada
Paula Guimaraes, University of Lisbon, Portugal
John Holford, University of Nottingham, UK
Henning Salling Olesen, Roskilde University, Denmark
Danny Wildemeersch, Leuven University, Belgium
Emilio Lucio-Villegas, University of Seville, Spain
Peter Mayo, University of Malta, Malta
Maria Mendel, Gdansk University, Poland
Marcella Milana, University of Verona, Italy
Vida Mohorcic-Spolar, Slovenian institute for adult education, Slovenia
José Monteagudo, University of Seville, Spain
Hana Cervinkova, Maynooth University, Ireland
Palle Rasmussen, Aalborg University, Denmark
Bernhard Schmidt-Hertha, University of Tuebingen, Germany
Joanna Ostrouch, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland
Daniel Schugurensky, Arizona state university, USA
Hongxia Shan, University of British Columbia, Canada
Päivi Siivonen, University ot Tampere, Finland
Bonnie Slade, University of Glasgow, UK
Camilla Thunborg, Stockholm University, Sweden
Rudolf Tippelt, Münich University, Germany
Joke Vandenabeele, Leuven University, Belgium
Cristina Vieira, University of Coimbra, Portugal
Astrid von Kotze, University of Western Cape, South Africa
Sue Webb, Monash University, Australia
Linden West, Canterbury Christ Church University, UK
Christine Zeuner, Helmut-Schmidt-Universität/Universität der Bundeswehr, Germany

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults – RELA

VOLUME 16 NUMBER 1 FEBRUARY 2025

Open papers

7 Navigating change: Theoretical perspectives to relate research on transitions and learning
Christiane Hof & Michael Bernhard

21 Civic Learning through active citizenship in diverse societies
Brigitte Kukovetz, Annette Sprung & Petra Wlasak

39 Adult education, democracy, and totalitarianism: A case study of the German Democratic Republic (1949-1990)
Tetyana Hoggan-Kloubert, Chad Hoggan & Nicole Luthardt

59 Directive adult education by political actors: Orientation expectations towards adults in Germany
Arnd-Michael Nohl

75 Ageing and complexity: Reframing older adults' learning through interdisciplinary lenses
Laura Formenti, Davide Cino & Francesca Loberto

97 Predicting drop-out during initial training among volunteer firefighters
Pauline Born

115 Made in the EU: Dual Europeanisation and the rhetorical construction of adult education (2000-2022)
Fátima Antunes

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2025, pp. 7-20

Navigating change: Theoretical perspectives to relate research on transitions and learning[1]

Christiane Hof
Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany (hof@em.uni-frankfurt.de)

Michael Bernhard
Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany (m.bernhard@em.uni-frankfurt.de)

Abstract

Although life course transitions are not a new topic – see for instance van Gennep's (1909/2019) work on rites of passage or various studies on changes in the life course, their social conditions, and societal consequences – educational research has explored the topic of transitions in a rather segmented fashion. Transitions have been investigated according to age (e.g., youth transitioning to adulthood), according to pedagogical institutions (e.g., from family to day care), and pertaining to education subdisciplines (transitions in adult education). As a result, it is easy to lose sight of the connections between life course transitions and profound questions of education and learning. With the aim of further developing the educational learning discourse, this conceptual paper discusses life course transitions as an impetus and framework for learning and transformation processes.

Keywords: transitions, learning, transformation, practice theory, pragmatism

Introduction: Research transitions

Transition research – broadly speaking – deals with changes in the life course. Whereas life course studies focus on the social-historical conditions and consequences of life courses (Elder et al., 2003; Levy & Bühlmann, 2016; Shanahan et al., 2016), transition research has thus far focused on the changes in and between life stages and the associated changes in status. Of interest are the forms, conditions, and consequences of transitions,

ISSN 2000-7426

© 2024 The authors
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/
http://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.4791
www.rela.ep.liu.se

which subjects experience against the backdrop of their changing (institutionalised) life course (Ecclestone et al., 2009a).

The theoretical and empirical approaches to studying these transitions are heterogeneous. There are studies of rites of passage (van Gennep, 1909/2019), understood as institutionalised forms of initiating and accompanying transitions between major turning points in the life course, when people move between different sets of social networks (such as in the transition from the group of children to the group of adult members of a family). These status passages are accompanied by new social positions, with new behavioural expectations and tasks (Glaser & Strauss, 1971; Heinz, 1997). From a sociological perspective, this research focuses on the social and institutional conditions of the transitions, the reproduction of social inequality in transitions (Buchmann & Steinhoff, 2017), and the social demands and challenges people are confronted with. In contrast, a doing-transitions perspective (Stauber et al., 2022) is interested in the social practices that produce and shape transitions and in the reconstruction of the individual, social, and institutional arrangements that constitute and influence the ways in which people deal with new situations in the life course.

In adult educational research, transitions have been discussed as forms of critical life events such as divorce, unemployment, the death of the partner, or illness (Merriam, 2005; Bühler et al., 2023). These are deemed starting points for organising professional educational support. Furthermore, research is oriented to the institutionalised life course (Kohli, 1985/2017) and the distinction of different pedagogical institutions. Accordingly, there are foremost studies that deal with transitions within or departing from the educational system – from school into vocational training or postsecondary education (Blossfeld & Rossbach, 2019; Larsen, 2022; Siivonen, 2016) or transitions into and throughout working life (Billett et al., 2021; Pita Castro, 2014; Stroobants et al., 2001). Topics include how transition-related challenges are dealt with, how significant others participate (Settersten & Thogmartin, 2018), and how professionals influence (successful) entry into the next phase of life (Bridges, 2020).

The serious social, political, and ecological challenges of the last few decades have clarified that transitions are more than just phases in the institutionalised life course (Kohli, 1985/2017). In a broader view, they must be seen as part of the coping with everyday life. Not only the transition from the training phase to employment and then that to the post-employment phase mark transitions. Family changes (e.g. parenting), migration, and work-related mobility or a change of career can also be interpreted as transitions in the life course.

From this perspective, in this paper, transitions can be understood as periods of uncertainty in which people must deal with different options for action. Drawing on an understanding of transitions as something to be shaped, constructed, and dealt with, the focus shifts to the subject that engages with changes in the life course and to whom the transition represents an impetus for learning. Consequently, we pursue in this paper the question of how transitions can be conceptualised as an impetus and frame for learning. In doing so, not only do the subject's individual transformations come into view, but so do the learning opportunities. Elaborating on learning opportunities in relation to transitions, allows us to emphasise the learning's social dimensions, and to further develop the educational learning discourse. At the core of our deliberations is the *relationship* between transitions and transformations, between the individual's change of social state and roles (Elder, 1985) – and the development of altered meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1978) or habits of mind (Dewey, 1933/1986).

As a theoretical starting point to relate transitions and learning in this paper, the pragmatist theory of learning (Dewey, 1933/1986) and transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1978) appear fruitful. From these perspectives, learning is conceptualised as an engagement due to irritating experiences (Dewey) or disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow), potentially leading to a transformation of experience or the development of new perspectives. By focusing on the learning process and the development of new perspectives, the embeddedness of the learning process in the experience of life course transitions – and therefore in the lifeworld – tends to be relegated to the background. To shift these socially situated dimensions of learning into the focus, reference to the conceptualisation of biographical learning (Alheit, 2018, 2022) seems to be helpful. It posits that 'the processual structures of our life course, the dynamics of their emergence at the surface suggest an extension or a restriction of autonomous biographical action' (Alheit, 2018, p. 161). Correspondingly, from the point of view of transition research that is interested in the processes shaping transitions, we argue that learning is understood not solely as an individual but rather as a socially embedded act. Institutionalised rules and normative expectations in the shaping of transitions as well as the socially shared forms of creating and sharing knowledge must be considered.

To illuminate these social dimensions of learning, we will, in a third step, shift our focus to learning as a social practice. Drawing on the work of Lave and Wenger (1991/2008) as well as newer approaches of practice theory, we aim to further develop perspectives on learning in the life course, particularly during life course transitions, thus, contributing to a *learning while doing transitions* perspective.

Approaches to understanding transitions as movement through an institutionalised life course

When transitions are conceptualised as changes in the status of the institutionalised life course (Buchmann, 1998; Ecclestone et al., 2009b; Elder et al., 2003; Heinz, 1997; Hirschfeld & Lenz, 2022; Krüger, 2022; Schoon, 2015), various questions regarding adult learning emerge: Who undergoes which transitions? Which demands result from the new role for the knowing and acting? How do people cope with these demands, and which societal and institutional forms of support exist or are conceivable?

With an eye on the study of conditions and processes of status passages, one can then analyse individual competencies, institutional and discursive framing, as well as the social and material conditions of bringing about the transitions. This understanding of transitions has led to attention being paid to various aspects of changes in the *institutionalised* life course as evidenced by the German National Education Panel (Allmendinger et al., 2019; Blossfeld & Rossbach, 2019; Ecclestone et al., 2009a).

Contrasting with this view of transitions that builds on the notion of societal and institutional expectations for the life course, there is a perspective that considers a transition as a phase of life in which previously held assumptions are challenged and new knowledge, orientations, and patterns of practice are required (Bridges, 2020; Merriam, 2005). In this view, adult learning comes into focus more than adult education. The experiences in the life course shift to the centre of attention as 'opportunities for learning and development' (Merriam, 2005, p. 5). Consequently, transitions have become a foundation for concepts in counselling (Anderson et al., 2021; Bridges, 2020) and theoretically strengthen a perspective that focuses on agency and identity in 'learning lives' (Biesta et al., 2011). As Merriam explains: 'The transition process involves letting

go of the past, experimenting with strategies and behaviours to accommodate the new, and finally, feeling comfortable with the changes one has adopted in terms of identity, values, behaviours, or social roles' (Merriam, 2005, p. 7).

How this understanding of learning in transitions can be further conceptualised will be the focus of the next sections.

Transitions as an impetus for learning and individual transformation in learning trajectories

The connection between learning and transitions becomes apparent particularly in situations in which learning is not conceptualised solely as a reaction to instruction but rather as learning across the life course (Hof, 2017, p. 271; Hof & Rosenberg, 2018).

In particular, the turn *from lifelong education to lifelong learning* in the 1990s has fostered a new theoretical discussion about the learning of adults (Hof, 2017). With reference to the tradition of life course research and biographical studies, learning has, thus, increasingly seen as embedded in life histories. Transitions as turning points in biographies serve as crystallisation points in which learning may become a necessity for the subject and thus an interesting point of investigation. Research into learning in the life course and biography demonstrates the importance of recognising learning as 'a subjective process, related to immediate sensory experience and to specific situations in which we are placed, as well as the cultural bodies of knowledge or scripts for interpreting experience, mostly mediated via language(s), available to us' (West, 2007, p. 286).

In this new tradition of biographical research, there is a growing body of work that reconstructs the biographical articulation of transitions or examines the individual processing of transition-related challenges as well as the individual shaping of personal trajectories (e.g., Biesta et al., 2011; Eberle et al., 2022; Karmelita, 2018). The empirical study of learning in transitions permits analysis of not only learning outcomes but also differentiated dimensions, challenges, and modes of learning – understood as individual transformation processes.

From this perspective, then, a transition can be viewed as a potential impetus for learning. Life events that challenge previously held patterns of action and orientation might lead to 'personal troubles' (Ingram et al., 2009, p. 3):

> If a life event is utterly incongruous with our previous experiences, we may reject it, and if it is too similar to previous experiences, we may not notice it. For learning to occur, an experience needs to be discomforting, disquieting, or puzzling enough for us not to reject or ignore it, but to attend to it and reflect on it. It is then that learning takes place. (Merriam, 2005, pp. 7-8)

The experience of a transition might turn into an impetus for learning through tensions that result from the not-yet-knowing against the backdrop of previous experience. Here, the *attention* paid to the experience becomes salient: 'Learning from a life event or experience in our lives begins with attending to and reflecting on it' (Merriam, 2005, p. 8).

Arguing from the pragmatist tradition, John Dewey, in particular, elaborated on the significance of irritations as the starting point for engagement with experiences. For him, the act of thinking commences with a diffuse state of 'perplexity, confusion, or doubt' (Dewey, 1933/1986, p. 123).

> Thinking begins in what may fairly enough be called a *forked-road* situation, a situation which is ambiguous, that presents a dilemma, that proposes alternatives. As long as our activity glides smoothly along from one thing to another, or as long as we permit our imagination to entertain fancies at pleasure, there is no call for reflection. Difficulty or obstruction in the way of reaching a belief brings us, however, to a pause. In the suspense of uncertainty, we metaphorically climb a tree; we try to find some standpoint from which we may survey additional facts and, getting a more commanding view of the situation, may decide how the facts stand related to one another. (Dewey, 1933/1986, p. 122, emphasis in original)

To move past uncertainty and doubt, individuals, according to Dewey, draw on their ability to reflect. They develop an idea on how the problem can be solved and the state of uncertainty be turned into a state of – at least preliminary – certainty (Dewey, 1933/1986, p. 206). In this process of inquiry, a pre-reflexive irritation leads to spontaneous 'suggestions' (Dewey, 1933/1986, p. 200) after which the problem is interpreted and intellectualised. Through establishing hypotheses, reasoning, and testing the hypothesis through overt or imaginative action, individuals assess whether assumptions are true or must be revised. In this way, the newly acquired experiences result in a new 'order of facts' (Dewey, 1933/1986, p. 117) which permits a changed view of the world and an adjusted potential for action. Dewey (1938/1988) understands experiences as both passive suffering and as an active process of interpretation and shaping of situations. Similarly, learning to engage with these experiences appears as a continuous process of interpreting and shaping the environment.

Through the interplay between the irritating impulses of the environment and the forms of an individual processing of these experiences, a learning process emerges and is manifested through transformed patterns of action and interpretation, called 'habits':

> The basic characteristic of habit is that every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences. For it is a somewhat different person who enters into them. (Dewey, 1933/1986, p. 18)

Thus, learning initiated through irritations takes place not only *in* life course transitions and societal transformations but also *as* individual transformation (English, 2005; Lave, 2019).

Emphasising the issue of a potential transformation, also Jack Mezirow underlines its relevance and describes the processing of and reflecting upon disorienting experiences as subsequent transformation of frames of references (Mezirow, 1978, 2000; Taylor & Cranton, 2013). Therefore, he talks about transformative learning: '*Transformative learning* refers to the processes that result in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world' (Hoggan, 2016, p. 71, emphasis in original). The starting point of transformative learning theory is the assumption that individuals interpret their world against the background of their 'taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mindsets)' (Mezirow, 2000, p. 7). If these frames of reference turn out to be unsuitable for understanding a new situation or for solving a problem, then the person has two options: one either ignores the problem or takes the irritation as an impetus to acquire new perspectives. When the newly acquired perspectives have been integrated into one's life with associated scripts for action habituated, transformation of the habits of mind is considered complete (Mezirow, 1991, p. 168). The new perspectives 'may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action' (Mezirow,

2000, p. 7). Transformative learning, as described by Mezirow, can thus manifest itself in the expansion of existing patterns of meaning, the acquisition of new perspectives, and critical reflection on and transformation of previous meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 2000, p. 19; Taylor & Cranton, 2013, p. 40).

Learning during life course transitions, as understood in this pragmatist tradition, can be seen as a process of reflective interaction with experience that leads to progress in action. But at the same time, the focus on experience points to the social dimensions of learning (Jarvis, 2006, 2009). The experience of irritating changes in the course of life and the interpretation of this transition not only result from the isolated coping of the individual but is much rather framed socially and associated with normative expectations of, for example, the societal context. Consequently, we argue, learning in life course transitions needs even more emphasis on an understanding of learning as both an individual *and* a social phenomenon (Hof, 2018, p. 184).

Learning during life course transitions as a social practice: Doing situated transitions

Studies of learning in transitions have been interested particularly in changed relationships to the self, world, and others (Koller, 2017; Merrill, 2009). These are conceptualised as the acquisition of new knowledge or the transformation of previous patterns of orientation and action. Learning, in this view, is understood as an inner process of acquisition and transformation of knowledge and competencies. Social aspects tend to appear merely as context, such as socio-structural life conditions (Levy & Bühlmann, 2016), belonging to milieus or collective discourses in biographical narrations (Dausien & Alheit, 2019).

Once the focus no longer rests solely on individual forms of transforming knowledge and experience in reaction to irritations but rather on how individuals shape biographical transitions, the view on learning in life course transitions also broadens. On the one hand, it refers to the fact that learning takes place against the background of biographically acquired orientations and patterns of interpretation with which perceptions are interpreted. At the same time, however, learning is also embedded and thus dependent on the experiences with which the individual is confronted as the 'material' to deal and engage with. As Dausien asserts:

> 'Life is a construction site', and learning is the constructive process in which interpretations and meaning are produced from actions and lived experiences. Which biographical meaning and knowledge configurations emerge, depends on the one hand on the 'material' and the tools that are available on the respective construction site, and on the other hand on the possibility space for concrete action, for initial testing and renewed attempts ..., for mistakes, modifications and new designs; finally, also on the communicative space for individual and joint reflection. (Dausien, 2008, p. 167, translation by the authors)

Biographical learning is therefore to be seen not only as an expression of individual forms of experience processing but also as a socially embedded process in many ways. To understand learning during transitions, we must take into account the relationality of individual and social aspects of processing experience.

The social embeddedness of learning was studied in particular by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991/2008). By drawing on ethnographic studies in which they analysed apprenticeship processes in different work contexts, they showed that the transmission of

knowledge did not occur through explicit instructions from experts but rather through the participation of newcomers in work activities and engagement with various complex tasks. Learning, thus, occurs as embedded in concrete (work) action. At that moment, not only is the acquisition process situated, but also the specific knowledge is relatively relevant and results from the particular task.

Workshop staff are part of a community of practice. Through this participation, they acquire socially shared knowledge – factual, procedural, and knowledge on social interactions – through which they complete shared tasks. Therefore, Lave and Wenger (1991/2008) also describe learning as a form of legitimate participation in the institutionalised social practices of the (work) community.

> Legitimate peripheral participation provides a way to speak about the relation between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. It concerns the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice. A person's intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a sociocultural practice. This social process includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills. (Lave & Wenger, 1991/2008, p. 29)

This perspective has central implications for theoretical approaches of learning which have been reflected only selectively in discussions on learning, particularly in a focus on learning during transitions. Lave and Wenger distance themselves from understanding learning as an individual *or* social phenomenon and instead view it as 'an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991/2008, p. 31). Their emphasis follows the extensive critique of supposing dichotomies of person and environment, thinking and acting, learning and living; a critique harking back to also pragmatist critiques of these dichotomies. Because as Lave underlines: 'Everyday life and learning both make and are made in the medium of participants' partial participation in ongoing, changing social practice' (Lave, 2019, p. 129). It is 'whole' people who live their lives and, in doing so, participate in the social world. Learning is, thus, part of social practice: 'It is a perspective that locates learning, not in the head or outside it, but in the relationship between the person and the world, which for human beings is a social person in a social world' (Wenger, 2010, p. 179).

However, Lave and Wenger (1991/2008) oppose the view that learners are being socialised into pre-existing social worlds. Instead, they emphasise the interdependence of person and world. The context, constituted through the respective situation, thus influences the acting and thinking of participants as, conversely, the activities of people shape the social world. In this sense, it would be incorrect to consider learning merely a process of changing knowledge and capabilities within a socially situational context. This is because the distinction between learner and social context would be maintained. Instead, learning is to be considered part of everyday life: 'it is the transformation of people that accompanies their participation in practices' (Schatzki, 2017, p. 26). Inasmuch, learning is a constitutive part of every social practice.

With their theory of situated learning, Lave and Wenger opened our view to learning being embedded in social practices and the potential for acquiring the necessary ability to participate and play along (Alkemeyer & Buschmann, 2017, p. 122) in social practices. Applying this emphasis on learning's situatedness to learning in life course transitions, we must consider that not only the experienced transition but also the various societal dimensions that structure the life situation are relevant. This might better be described by referring to the concept of practice architectures that Kemmis et al. (2014) presented:

> learning is *always* and *only* a process of being stirred into practices, even when a learner is learning alone or from participation with others in shared activities. We learn not only knowledge, embodied in our minds, bodies and feelings, but also how to interact with others and the world; our learning is not only epistemologically secured (as cognitive knowledge) but also *interactionally secured* in sayings, doings and relatings that take place amid the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements that pertain in the settings we inhabit. Our learning is bigger than us; it always positions and orients us in a shared, three dimensional – semantic, material and social – world. (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 59, emphasis in original)

The learning process characterised in this way refers to participation in a social practice. The ability to participate is enabled and constrained by various factors. These could be prior knowledge, social communication possibilities, as well as financial resources to deal with transition challenges (Gravett & Ajjawi, 2022; Kemmis, 2022; Lizier et al., 2023; Penuel et al., 2017; Romano et al., 2022).

Beyond the individual competencies, interests and economic life situations, a wide range of learning opportunities or learning cultures (Hodkinson et al., 2007) provide resources for shaping transitions. By emphasising the '*cultural-discursive, material-economic,* and *social-political arrangements*' that enable social practices, Kemmis et al. (2014, p. 30) help to highlight the societal aspects of power and inequality that also influence learning processes. Researching learning in life course transitions, as we have developed in this paper, has started with the question of how to shape and deal with experienced changes in the life course. Emphasising the process of doing transition with a focus on learning, we pointed to social practices as a promising theoretical perspective to understand these learning processes. Against that backdrop, the situated characteristics of communities of practices are to be highlighted. We must consider that social communities are embedded in broader temporal, material, political, and social frames (Lave et al., 2024). Further research could point to the dialectic relation between society and everyday life and their impetus for learning in life transitions.

With respect to individual lives, not only the social factors are complex, but also the plurality of life-situations. A person participates not only in one community of practice or practice architectures. Instead, a person moves between those and, thus, participates in *different* communities and practice arrangements:

> Learning takes a course in the metaphorical sense of forming a progression, different acquisition episodes overlapping or occurring successively and building on prior ones. … Learning also takes a course in the literal sense that its occurrences form a broken space-time path through bundles of practices and arrangements. (Schatzki, 2017, p. 30)

Practice-theoretically speaking, the lives of subjects can be described as a sequence of activities. These connect to trajectories (Dreier, 1999; Lave, 1997): 'Trajectories are made and made possible in ongoing relations of participation in practice' (Lave, 1997, p. 131). Whereas social institutions and social practices are significant in shaping life courses, they do not determine the conduct of life. Much rather, various institutionalised social practices provide opportunities for participation. Whether a person participates in them and in which communities of practice they participate are a result neither solely of the person's intention nor of their expectations. Instead, it is the specific relation between these two because 'trajectories of participation involve movement across space, place and communities of practice' (Lave, 1997, p. 132).

Describing learning as a social practice in detail thus requires close analysis, as also Schatzki pointed out: 'Which learning opportunities are afforded at these locations

depend on the practices that are carried on at them, for example, leather good production practices (apprenticeship), cooking practices, teaching practices, training practices, review practices, and the like' (Schatzki, 2017, p. 30).

Conclusion: Understanding and studying transitions as an impetus for learning

Transition research that is interested in the processes of constructing and shaping transitions thus prompts us to view learning not only as a temporarily structured process of an individually changed relation to the world, to others, and to oneself (cf. Koller, 2017, p. 34) but also as a socially embedded phenomenon. Through participation in practices, learners learn, change the practices themselves, and generate new knowledge. Against the backdrop of understanding irritations in life course transitions as the departing point for learning, one can ask *which* irritations come into focus, how people deal with them, and which further activities result from this engagement.

Understanding learning as a social practice further implies a close look at the social situatedness of activities. In doing so, one must consider the specific configuration of doings, sayings, and social as well as material arrangements. This is because people make and have experiences in and of the social world. They interpret and reflect on these experiences against the backdrop of perspectives and expectations deemed to be relevant in this social world. Finally, people refer in their activities to socially available rules of interaction and opportunity spaces: 'Life trajectories pass through, occur on the background of, and are part of as well as dependent on bundles of practices and arrangements. Lives and practice-arrangements are distinct phenomena even though they episodically coincide and are mutually dependent' (Schatzki, 2019, p. 68).

From the practice-theoretical perspective, specific engagements with irritations and unexpected experiences are thus understood as a social practice in which subjects can relate to different 'bundles of practices and arrangements' (Schatzki, 2016, p. 26). The question of which specific path will be taken would then be a matter of investigation and detailed analysis of life courses. Conceptualising a transition as an impetus for learning leads us to call for the empirical study of transitional learning processes and an analysis of institutionalised bundles of practice and communities of practice as opportunity spaces for learning.

Moreover, researchers must consider that transitions in the life course differ in their shapes and consequently relationship with learning. They might be mired and complex or easy to shape. Furthermore, individuals have different capacities and resources to deal with the challenges they have experienced (Field & Lynch, 2015).

Finally, recent studies emphasise that transitions differ. They might be linear processes or rhizome-like, possibly linked with other transitions or the transitions of other people (Settersten et al., 2022). The doing of transitions might be explained as a form of becoming or as a dis-assemblage (Amundsen, 2022; Gale & Parker, 2014; Gravett, 2021; Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018). The theoretical perspectives presented in this paper have been drawn upon to further investigate empirically in other studies *how* such non-linear and linked transitions – for instance transitions in adults' lives due to migration – may serve as an impetus for learning (Bernhard, 2022, 2023a, 2023b, 2024). Taking the pragmatist, transformative and practice oriented theoretical views on learning mentioned above as the conceptual framework, these studies illustrate how irritations, dilemmas and social dimensions shape adult migrants' learning while dealing with excluding practices

(Bernhard, 2023a) and various forms of boundaries (Bernhard, 2022). These studies further illuminate that learning in (migration-related) transitions is influenced by normative ideas concerning the temporal structure of the life course in the respective societal contexts and by the ways, in which subjects conceptualise their own learning (Bernhard, 2023b). Such research on the relationship between learning and transitions aims to broaden our understanding of learning and knowing, probing for the value of including so-called indigenous or non-Western perspectives on learning which further emphasize the relational nature of learning and transitions (Bernhard & Hof, 2023).

Whatever their shape, transitions serve as crucial starting points for learning. And, as we have argued here, taking a transitions perspective deepens our understanding of learning, particularly regarding the biographical and social practices in which learning is embedded.

Notes

[1] This article is a translated and expanded version of a paper originally published in German under the title 'Übergänge als Anlass für Lernprozesse' in the *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik, Beiheft 68(2022)*, pp. 181-194, https://doi.org/10.3262/ZPB2201181. Certain sections from the original were revised or removed to adapt to the focus of this expanded version.

Declaration of conflicting interests

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

References

Alheit, P. (2018). Biographical learning – Within the lifelong learning discourse. In K. Illeris (Ed.), *Contemporary Theories of Learning: Learning theorists ... In their own words* (2nd ed., pp. 153-165). Routledge.

Alheit, P. (2022). "Biographical Learning" reloaded. Theoretical grounding of a challenging approach. *Adult Education Critical Issues*, *2*(1), 7-19. https://doi.org/10.12681/aeci.30008

Alkemeyer, T., & Buschmann, N. (2017). Learning in and across practices: Enablement as subjectivation. In A. Hui, T. R. Schatzki, & E. Shove (Eds.), *The nexus of practices: Connections, constellations, practitioners* (pp. 8-23). Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Allmendinger, J., Kleinert, C., Pollak, R., Vicari, B., Wölfel, O., Althaber, A., Antoni, M., Christoph, B., Drasch, K., Janik, F., Künster, R., Laible, M.-C., Leuze, K., Matthes, B., Ruland, Schulz, B., & Trahms, A. (2019). Adult education and lifelong learning. In H.-P. Blossfeld, & H.-G. Rossbach (Eds.), *Education as a lifelong process: The German National Educational Panel Study (NEPS)* (2nd rev. ed., pp. 325-346). Springer VS.

Amundsen, D. (2022). Life is not always linear: Expanding the notion of transitions in higher education to challenge structural, static and linear processes facing Indigenous and older adult students. *Studies in Higher Education*, *47*(8), 1681-1693. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2021.1948526

Anderson, M., Goodman, J., & Schlossberg, N. (2021). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking Schlossberg's theory with practice in a diverse world* (5th ed.). Springer.

Bernhard, M. (2022). Boundary experiences in Canada: 'Doing migration' and the role of adult education. *Der Pädagogische Blick*, *30*(1), 6-18. https://doi.org/10.3262/PB2201006

Bernhard, M. (2023a). Doing migration in adulthood: Learning to engage with the Canadian experience discourse. *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, *35*(2), 19-35. https://doi.org/10.56105/cjsae.v35i02.5688

Bernhard, M. (2023b). Learning by doing migration: Temporal dimensions of life course transitions. *Studies in Continuing Education*, *46*(2), 282-298. https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2023.2223131

Bernhard, M. (2024). *Lernprozesse Erwachsener in migrationsbedingten Übergängen: Learning by Doing Migration [Adult learning processes in migration-related transitions: Learning by doing migration]*. Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-45298-8

Bernhard, M., & Hof, C. (2023). Social dimensions of learning in transitions: The heuristic value of non-western perspectives of communal learning. In J. Sumner, & E. Dobrich (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 2023 Conference of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE). Conference theme: Community* (pp. 40-46).

Biesta, G., Field, J., Hodkinson, P., Macleod, F. J., & Goodson, I. (2011). *Improving learning through the lifecourse: Learning lives*. Routledge.

Billett, S., Le, A. H., Smith, R., & Choy, S. (2021). The kinds and character of changes adults negotiate across worklife transitions. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *40*(5-6), 499-513. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2021.1989723

Blossfeld, H.-P., & Rossbach, H.-G. (Eds.). (2019). *Education as a lifelong process: The German National Educational Panel Study (NEPS)* (2nd rev. ed.). Springer VS.

Bridges, W. (2020). *Transitions: Making sense of life's changes* (40th anniversary ed.). Da Capo Lifelong.

Buchmann, M. (1998). *The script of life in modern society: Entry into adulthood in a changing world*. University of Chicago Press.

Buchmann, M., & Steinhoff, A. (2017). Social inequality, life course transitions, and adolescent development: Introduction to the special issue. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *46*(10), 2083-2090. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-017-0740-2

Bühler, J. L., Orth, U., Bleidorn, W., Weber, E., Kretzschmar, A., Scheling, L., & Hopwood, C. J. (2023). Life events and personality change: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *European Journal of Personality*, *38*(3), 544-568. https://doi.org/10.1177/08902070231190219

Dausien, B. (2008). Lebenslanges Lernen als Leitlinie für die Bildungspraxis: Überlegungen zur pädagogischen Konstruktion von Lernen aus biographietheoretischer Sicht [Lifelong learning as a guiding principle for educational practice: Reflections on the pedagogical construction of learning from a biographical-theoretical perspective]. In H. Herzberg (Ed.), *Lebenslanges Lernen: Theoretische Perspektiven und empirische Befunde im Kontext der Erwachsenenbildung* [Lifelong learning: Theoretical perspectives and empirical findings in the context of adult education] (pp. 151-174). Peter Lang.

Dausien, B., & Alheit, P. (2019). Biographical approaches in education in Germany. In G. W. Noblit (Ed.), *Oxford research encyclopedia of education.* Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.519

Dewey, J. (1986). How We Think. In J. A. Boydston (Ed.), *John Dewey - The later works (1925 - 1953): Vol. 8: 1933* (pp. 105-352). Southern Illinois University Press. (Original work published 1933)

Dewey, J. (1988). Experience and Education. In J. A. Boydston (Ed.), *John Dewey - The later works, 1925 - 1953: Vol 13: 1938-1939* (pp. 1-62). Southern Illinois University Press. (Original work published 1938)

Dreier, O. (1999). Personal trajectories of participation across contexts of social practice. *Outlines. Critical Practice Studies*, *1*(1), 5-32. https://doi.org/10.7146/ocps.v1i1.3841

Eberle, N., Lütgens, J., Pohling, A., Spies, T., & Bauer, P. (2022). Biographical articulation in transition. In B. Stauber, A. Walther, & R. A. Settersten Jr. (Eds.), *Doing transitions in the life course: Processes and practices* (pp. 139-154). Springer.

Ecclestone, K., Biesta, G., & Hughes, M. (Eds.). (2009a). *Transitions and Learning through the Lifecourse*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203867617

Ecclestone, K., Biesta, G., & Hughes, M. (2009b). Transitions in the lifecourse: The role of identity, agency and structure. In K. Ecclestone, G. Biesta, & M. Hughes (Eds.), *Transitions and Learning through the Lifecourse* (pp. 1-15). Routledge.

Elder, G. H. (1985). Perspectives on the life course. In G. H. Elder (Ed.), *Life course dynamics: Trajectories and transitions, 1968-1980* (pp. 23-49). Cornell University Press.

Elder, G. H., Kirkpatrick Johnson, M., & Crosnoe, R. (2003). The emergence and development of life course theory. In J. T. Mortimer, & M. J. Shanahan (Eds.), *Handbooks of sociology and social research. Handbook of the life course* (pp. 3-19). Springer.

English, A. (2005). *Negativity* and the *New* in John Dewey´s theory of learning and democracy: Toward a renewed look at learning cultures. *Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft*, *8*(1), 28-37. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11618-005-0121-6

Field, J., & Lynch, H. (2015). Getting Stuck, Becoming Unstuck: Agency, Identity and Transitions between Learning Contexts. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, *21*(1), 3-17. https://doi.org/10.7227/jace.21.1.2
Gale, T., & Parker, S. (2014). Navigating change: A typology of student transition in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, *39*(5), 734-753. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2012.721351
Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1971). *Status passage*. *International library of sociology and social reconstruction*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Gravett, K. (2021). Troubling transitions and celebrating becomings: From pathway to rhizome. *Studies in Higher Education*, *46*(8), 1506-1517. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1691162
Gravett, K., & Ajjawi, R. (2022). Belonging as situated practice. *Studies in Higher Education*, *47*(7), 1386-1396. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2021.1894118
Heinz, W. R. (1997). Status passages, social risks and the life course: A conceptual framework. In W. R. Heinz, & R. Becker-Schmidt (Eds.), *Status passages and the life course: Vol. 1. Theoretical advances in life course research* (2nd ed., pp. 9-22). Deutscher Studien Verlag.
Hirschfeld, H., & Lenz, B. (2022). Young people's use and construction of institutional support in transitions from school to work. In B. Stauber, A. Walther, & R. A. Settersten Jr. (Eds.), *Doing transitions in the life course: Processes and practices* (pp. 55-70). Springer.
Hodkinson, P., Biesta, G., & James, D. (2007). Understanding learning cultures. *Educational Review*, *59*(4), 415-427. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131910701619316
Hof, C. (2017). Is there space for bildung and transformative learning in the lifelong learning discourse? In A. Laros, T. Fuhr, & E. W. Taylor (Eds.), *International issues in adult education: volume 21. Transformative learning meets Bildung: An international exchange* (pp. 269-278). Sense Publishers.
Hof, C. (2018). Der Lebenslauf als Rahmen für Lern- und Bildungsprozesse. Perspektiven und Desiderata [The lifecourse as a framework for learning and educational processes: Perspectives and desiderata]. In C. Hof, & H. Rosenberg (Eds.), *Lernen im Lebenslauf: Theoretische Perspektiven und empirische Zugänge* (181-204). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
Hof, C., & Rosenberg, H. (Eds.). (2018). *Lernen im Lebenslauf: Theoretische Perspektiven und empirische Zugänge [Learning in the lifecourse: Theoretical perspectives and empirical approaches]*. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
Hoggan, C. (2016). Transformative learning as a metatheory: Definition, criteria, and typology. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *66*(1), 57-75. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713615611216
Ingram, R., Field, J., & Gallacher, J. (2009). Learning transitions: research, policy, practice. In J. Field, J. Gallacher, & R. Ingram (Eds.), *Researching transitions in lifelong learning* (pp. 1-6). Routledge.
Jarvis, P. (2006). *Towards a Comprehensive Theory of Human Learning*. Routledge.
Jarvis, P. (2009). Learning to be a person in society: learning to be me. In K. Illeris (Ed.), *Contemporary theories of learning: Learning theorists ... in their own words* (pp. 21-34). Routledge.
Karmelita, C. E. (2018). Exploring the experiences of adult learners in a transition program. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, *24*(2), 141-164. https://doi.org/10.1177/1477971418791587
Kemmis, S. (2022). *Transforming practices: Changing the world with the theory of practice architectures*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-8973-4
Kemmis, S., Wilkinson, J., Edwards-Groves, C., Hardy, I., Grootenboer, P., & Bristol, L. (2014). *Changing practices, changing education*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4560-47-4
Kohli, M. (2017). Die Institutionalisierung des Lebenslaufs [The Institutionalization of the lifecourse]. *KZfSS Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, *69*(Suppl. 1), 495-524. (Original work published 1985) https://doi.org/10.1007/s11577-017-0417-6
Koller, H.-C. (2017). Bildung as a transformative process. In A. Laros, T. Fuhr, & E. W. Taylor (Eds.), *Transformative learning meets Bildung: An international exchange* (vol. 12, pp. 33-42). Sense Publishers.
Krüger, H.-H. (2022). Young adults' exclusive educational careers in the transition to higher education or employment: Key findings of a qualitative longitudinal study. In B. Stauber, A. Walther, & R. A. Settersten Jr. (Eds.), *Doing transitions in the life course: Processes and practices* (pp. 71-86). Springer.
Larsen, L. (2022). Work pedagogy as an alternative path to adult life. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *13*(3), 247-259. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.3511
Lave, J. (1997). On learning. *Forum Kritische Psychologie*, *38*, 120-135.
Lave, J. (2019). *Learning and everyday life: Access, participation and changing practice*. Cambridge University Press.

Lave, J., Hof, C.. & Bernhard, M. (2024). Adult learning in everyday life: A conversation on social relations and situated practices [Manuscript in preparation]. In M. Bernhard, S. Billett, C. Hof, K. Kraus, V. J. Marsick, & P. H. Sawchuk (Eds.), *Adult education in changing times: Learning at the nexus of life, work, and transitions.* Routledge.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (2008). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation* (18th printing). Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1991)

Levy, R., & Bühlmann, F. (2016). Towards a socio-structural framework for life course analysis. *Advances in Life Course Research*, *30*, 30-42. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2016.03.005

Lizier, A. L., Milani Price, O., & Francisco, S. (2023). Coming to practice differently in the workplace: A practice architectures exploration of workplace learning in times of change. *Studies in Continuing Education*, *46*(3), 317-332. https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037x.2023.2186387

Merriam, S. B. (2005). How adult life transitions foster learning and development. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, *2005*(108), 3-13. https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.193

Merrill, B. (Ed.). (2009). *Learning to change? The role of identity and learning careers in adult education*. Peter Lang.

Mezirow, J. (1978). Perspective transformation. *Adult Education*, *28*(2), 100-110. https://doi.org/10.1177/074171367802800202

Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. Jossey-Bass.

Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to think like an Adult: Core concepts of transformation theory. In J. Mezirow (Ed.), *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 3-33). Jossey-Bass.

Penuel, W. R., van Horne, K., DiGiacomo, D., & Kirshner, B. (2017). A social practice theory of learning and becoming across contexts and time. *Front Learning Research*, *4*(4), 30-38. https://doi.org/10.14786/flr.v4i4.205

Pita Castro, J. C. (2014). The transition from initial vocational training to the world of work: The case of art school students. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *5*(1), 111-126. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela0107

Romano, A., Bracci, F., & Marsick, V. J. (2022). A Practice-Based View of Transformative Learning: An Exploratory Study on the Practical Creativity. In A. Nicolaides, S. Eschenbacher, P. T. Buergelt, Y. Gilpin-Jackson, M. Welch, & M. Misawa (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Learning for Transformation* (pp. 109-128). Springer International Publishing.

Schatzki, T. R. (2016). Crises and adjustments in ongoing life. *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, *41*(Suppl. 1), 17-33. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11614-016-0204-z

Schatzki, T. R. (2017). Practices and learning. In P. Grootenboer, C. Edwards-Groves, & S. Choy (Eds.), *Practice theory perspectives on pedagogy and education: Praxis, diversity and contestation* (pp. 23-43). Springer.

Schatzki, T. R. (2019). *Social change in a material world*. Routledge.

Schoon, I. (2015). Diverse pathways: Rethinking the transition to adulthood. In P. R. Amato, A. Booth, S. McHale, & J. van Hook (Eds.), *Families in an era of increasing inequality: Diverging destinies* (Vol. 5, pp. 115-136). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-08308-7_9

Settersten, R. A., Jr., Stauber, B., & Walther, A. (2022). The significance of relationality in "doing transitions". In B. Stauber, A. Walther & R. A. Settersten Jr. (Eds.), *Doing transitions in the life course: Processes and practices* (pp. 235-252). Springer.

Settersten, R. A., Jr., & Thogmartin, A. (2018). Flux: Insights into the social aspects of life transitions. *Research in Human Development*, *15*(3-4), 360-373. https://doi.org/10.1080/15427609.2018.1513779

Shanahan, M. J., Mortimer, J. T., & Kirkpatrick Johnson, M. (Eds.). (2016). *Handbook of the Life Course: Volume II* (2016). Springer International Publishing.

Siivonen, P. (2016). Becoming an educable lifelong learning subject: adult graduates' transitions in education and working life. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *35*(1), 36-50. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2015.1129365

Stauber, B., Walther, A., & Settersten, R. A., Jr. (Eds.). (2022). *Doing transitions in the life course: Processes and practices*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13512-5

Stroobants, V., Jans, M., & Wildemeersch, D. (2001). Making sense of learning for work. Towards a framework of transitional learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *20*(1-2), 114-126. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370121184

Taylor, C. A., & Harris-Evans, J. (2018). Reconceptualising transition to Higher Education with Deleuze and Guattari. *Studies in Higher Education*, *43*(7), 1254-1267. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2016.1242567

Taylor, E. W., & Cranton, P. A. (2013). A theory in progress? Issues in transformative learning theory. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *4*(1), 35-47. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela5000

van Gennep, A. (2019). *The rites of passage* (reprint). University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1909)

Wenger, E. (2010). Communities of practice and social learning systems: The career of a concept. In C. Blackmore (Ed.), *Social Learning Systems and Communities of Practice* (pp. 179-198). Springer London. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-84996-133-2_11

West, L. (2007). Biographical and life history approaches: Commonalities and differences in the study of adult and lifelong learning. In L. West, P. Alheit, A. S. Anderson, & B. Merrill (Eds.), *Using biographical and life history approaches in the study of adult and lifelong learning* (pp. 279–294). Peter Lang.

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2025, pp. 21-37

Civic Learning through active citizenship in diverse societies

Brigitte Kukovetz
University of Graz, Austria (brigitte.kukovetz@uni-graz.at)

Annette Sprung
University of Graz, Austria (annette.sprung@uni-graz.at)

Petra Wlasak
University of Graz, Austria (petra.wlasak@uni-graz.at)

Abstract

In response to the growing heterogenous populations in urban areas, and the important role of civic engagement and active citizenship for the promotion of democratic processes, this paper discusses the active participation of resident foreign citizens and/or persons with a history of migration, in urban areas. The theoretical connections between active citizenship, lived citizenship and civic learning are outlined and then linked with the results of an applied research project focused on various aspects of gender. In conclusion, active – lived – citizenship, in particular 'performative' acts of citizenship, generate civic learning as subjectification. Public spaces as learning opportunities for active engagement should take into account aspects of diversity as well as inequalities in a diverse society in order to promote inclusion and democracy for as many residents as possible regardless of their citizenship status.

Keywords: migration, active citizenship, civic learning, public pedagogy, lived citizenship

Introduction

Cities are often perceived as engines for social change. They are discussed both as places where social change can be created and implemented, and as places that are at the fore front of social transformations. (Pietrzak-Franger et al., 2018). This is especially true in

ISSN 2000-7426
© 2024 The authors

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/
http://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.4407
www.rela.ep.liu.se

the case of demographic changes due to migration. Globally, most migrants live in cities (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2017). In Europe, migrants[1] settle in cities at a disproportionately high rate compared to the native-born population. In 2014, more than 85.2 % of immigrants born outside the EU, 78.8% of migrants born within the EU, but only 69 % of native born people were living in urban areas, (cities or towns) (Eurostat, 2017). The percentage of second generation migrants born in non-EU countries living in urban areas is even higher, and amounts to 90 % (Eurostat, 2017).

As cities become highly diverse, this development opens up new questions, topics and challenges. In this paper, we focus on the aspect of cities as starting points of many initiatives of civic engagement, a process referred to as ‘active citizenship’ (Bee, 2017). The people involved are ‘active citizens’, or – to illustrate the tendency of dissent towards the reigning social order – as ‘activist citizens’ (Isin, 2008; Newman, 2011). We will henceforth call this active engagement in urban areas, as a reference to the term of ‘urban citizenship’ (Schilliger, 2018) an ‘active urban citizenship’. Both active and activist citizens are engaged in promoting more inclusion of undocumented migrants in cities (see the debate on solidarity cities or sanctuary cities, Wenke & Kron, 2019). Regardless of the specific cause, the active participation of citizens enriches socio-political debates and these are inherent to the democratic process (Biesta et al., 2014).

Another aspect of democracy is the inclusion of as many residents as possible in relevant processes, a significant challenge in times of growing mobility. Formal opportunities for democratic participation are greatly limited for non-citizens in most of the 56 countries that the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX[2]) measures worldwide, including the Member States of the EU and the OECD (Solano & Huddleston, 2020b). Nevertheless, many migrants use informal modes of participation. In the practice of active citizenship, gender plays an important role and the aspects of gender, age, racialization and sexualization must be considered in analysing acts of citizenship (Newman & Tonkens, 2011b).

In the field of civic engagement and active citizenship, informal learning processes are widely researched (Foley, 1999; Duguid et al., 2013), in the last decade the specific processes of *civic* learning have been brought to the fore (for example Trumann, 2013; Caris & Cowell, 2016; Fleischmann & Steinhilpfer, 2017; Sprung & Kukovetz, 2018). Despite this, the literature provides little insight into the conditions surrounding the promotion of active citizenship and civic learning through engagement.

Thus, in this paper we aim to analyse civic learning processes that take place during the practice and pedagogical promotion of active citizenship, especially for women living in diverse settings. We will start by outlining our theoretical framework. From the wide range of approaches to active citizenship, we focused on concepts that we believe to be applicable to the living conditions of marginalized groups, especially of migrants, and which stem from a critical theoretical framework (such as feminist theories). After some general points on active citizenship, we will focus on the concept of lived citizenship (Lister et al., 2007). This feminist approach also draws attention to forms of engagement that are rooted in people’s everyday actions, often in the domestic sphere or in local (e.g. ethnic) communities. Due to our focus on marginalized individuals who often do not even have citizenship rights, engagement mostly takes place beyond the ‘traditional’ spaces of active citizenship and is therefore at risk of being overlooked. In order to include the structural conditions for political participation and the spatial dimension of active citizenship, considerations of urban citizenship will be discussed in the theoretical part of the paper. This perspective will also be important in understanding our empirical case study. A dynamic understanding of citizenship rather than a constant and static one, will form the basis of our analysis. In addition, we will focus on civic learning processes

through and in the interest of active citizenship, and their connection to public pedagogy and the approaches of lived and urban citizenship. After having outlined the theoretical framework we will present a case study of civic participation processes involving migrants in the city of Graz, Austria. We will highlight the current situation as well as the efforts of the municipality of the city of Graz, to include residents, and particularly migrants, in civic engagement processes. With an innovative example of promoting active citizenship we will highlight connections between lived citizenship and the concept of civic learning. We will conclude with conditions, that we consider to be important for equitable and need based reinforcement of active citizenship and civic learning in diverse societies.

Active citizenship

A number of terms have been used to describe people's societal involvement, such as social or civic participation/engagement/involvement, (political) activism and active citizenship. In this context, the last term is of particular interest, because the reference to 'citizenship' allows us to discuss the peculiarities of civic participation in societies shaped by migration.

The term citizenship refers mainly to legal status (including rights and responsibilities) of an individual within the national state (Sassen, 2002). While it is connected to the idea of inclusion, it is also linked to the idea of an exclusive community with boundaries, usually the nation-state (Bosniak, 2006). Considering the rise in international mobility and the new social realities that follow, citizenship scholars have developed refined approaches such as transnational citizenship or inclusive citizenship. Three main aspects make up citizenship-membership, rights and participation (Giugni & Grasso, 2021) The concepts that highlight migration are mostly found under participation. This goes along with Isin and Nielsens's (2008) focus on 'acts of citizenship' (Isin & Nielsen, 2008), as opposed to the mere status of citizenship. Such 'acts constitute actors who claim and assert rights and obligations' (Isin, 2008, p. 39) and by doing so 'enact themselves as activist citizens' (Isin, 2008, p. 39). These acts of citizenship have more than a mere political dimension. They exist in a framework of an ethical, cultural, social and sexual dimension, as a result of their origin in the individual background of their actors. By performing these acts, the actors themselves are transformed in addition to transforming the acts of citizenship, the forms (orientations, strategies, technologies) as well as the modes (being performed by citizens, strangers, outsiders or foreigners) (Isin, 2008). Isin defines these actors as '*activist* citizens'. This distinction between 'active' and 'activist' citizens could be fruitful in the understanding of the '"Janus face" of active citizenship' (Newman & Tonkens, 2011a, p. 198). Janet Newman and Evelien Tonkens refer to the idea of Ruth Lister et al. (2007), who describe citizenship as janus-faced, simultaneously possessing an inclusionary and exclusionary, emancipatory and disciplinary quality (Lister et al., 2007). Similarly, *active citizenship* can at once be both emancipatory and disciplining: On the one hand, active citizenship can be seen as practice and recognition of social movements demanding participation in and transformation of politics and policies. On the other hand, it is often argued, that active citizenship is a new form of governance, turning active engagement into a duty of citizens, compensating for state services (Newman & Tonkens, 2011a).

A feminist approach: Lived citizenship

Gender is an important factor in the context of citizenship, even though it has been neglected in theory for a long time. When analysing gendered consequences of policies, it is important to keep in mind the everyday lived experiences of people (Newman & Tonkens, 2011b). The concept of *lived citizenship* takes into account not only the demands and pleas for justice expressed by civil society, but also the everyday actions of people in the intimate/domestic sphere. Such actions can have a political dimension and can in fact be political acts (Lister, 2007). In response to the feminist claim 'the personal is political' (Hanisch, 1970, p. 76), Lister points out that citizenship is a lived experience and cannot be separated from its social or cultural context, nor from its spatial dimension. Citizenship *influences* and *is influenced by* 'people's social and cultural backgrounds and material circumstances' (Lister, 2007, p. 55). It negotiates and creates practices of inclusion, exclusion, responsibilities, belonging and participation (Lister, 2007). In this sense, Lister includes these cultural and social acts as political – similarly to the understanding and definition of acts of citizenship of Isin and Nielsen (Newman & Tonkens, 2011c). This perspective also helps to shed light on other marginalized groups in society who often are not recognised as political subjects.

In order to grasp and analyse lived citizenship, Kallio et al. (2020) differentiate between four dimensions. First, the dimension of spatiality implies that both the more local level of citizenship and the development of transnational forms of citizenship must be considered. Several aspects could be interesting here when looking at the situation of migrants – for example, they often live in segregated areas with subpar infrastructure and poor housing conditions. It is fair to assume that residents of marginalised districts have many concerns related to the infrastructure and the spaces available. At the same time they lack ways to voice their concerns, ideas or dissent in regard to these issues. The second dimension of lived citizenship is the one of intersubjectivity, referring to how citizenship is shaped interpersonally and intergenerationally. Kallio et al. (2020) talk about the 'intersection of relationships with significant and strange others' (p. 717). Here, a clear link appears to learning processes that could potentially take place through negotiating topics within and beyond the boundaries of the own community. Public spaces, open for encounters (such as community centres), are relevant in this context. The third dimension of lived citizenship is the relationship to affective experiences, meaning the 'deep significance of the feelings associated with being a citizen' (Kallio et al., 2020, p. 718). The fourth dimension highlights the performative aspect, pointing out the practices and actions associated with citizenship (Kallio et al., 2020). These four dimensions provide the tools to comprehend lived active citizenship as a locally rooted, personal, emotional and performative act carried out by urban residents.

We want to use these approaches as a basis for presenting and analysing civic learning, with regards to active citizenship in the chapter 'Civic Learning'.

Active citizenship in the urban context

The origins of active citizenship can often be found in cities. As previously mentioned, cities are becoming more diverse, and migration is the main driving force behind urbanization (United Nations Human Settlements Programme [UN-Habitat], 2020).

Against this background, it is interesting to consider how opportunities for active citizenship develope in urban space, which face the challenge of constant change and a scarcity of resources. Cities become political spaces, where questions of access to

resources, power, belonging and rights/responsibilities are continuously negotiated. Thus, developments unfold in which actors draw public attention to their concerns and interests.

In view of an increasingly diverse society, Schillinger refers to these collective practices of struggle for civil rights, as urban citizenship (Schilliger, 2018). To name only two examples of attempts at taking back the city, people in many places campaign for the rights of refugees (Solidarity Cities) or resist gentrification projects (Schilliger, 2018; Wenke & Kron, 2019). Sarah Schillinger (2018) describes the concrete utopia as a common feature of these movements. Referring to people becoming active beyond political constraints and finding ways out of a defensive and paralyzing situation, like current migration and asylum policies.

These developments show how cities are confronted with the increasing complexity inherent in highly differentiated and diverse societies (Bollow et al., 2014). Many urban policy makers are becoming aware of the importance of creating and implementing need-based policies that are aligned with the demands of the residents, and that include the knowledge and the experience of various actors while considering the social needs and aspirations of all citizens (Vanolo, 2016). Consequently, urban development and planning, in connection with the structural-spatial, social, ecological, economic and/or cultural aspects of an area, should be perceived as joint tasks that are shaped by a multitude of actors, including citizens (Selle, 2013).

Hence, public authorities need active citizens in order to develop and implement urban policies. However, the idea of what the role and legitimate power of active citizens should be varies. Thomas Mattijssen et al. (2019) summarizes the challenges faced by active citizens in urban governance and points out that active citizenship often remains limited in scope and simply reproduces existing power relations. Furthermore, ‘citizens often experience a lack of support from authorities or are even constrained by existing policies, which prevents them from realizing substantive outcomes.’ (Mattijssen et al., 2019, p. 2). To address these challenges, Diana Mitlin (2021) calls for a political understanding of participation, rather than a purely functional or technical one, an understanding that takes into consideration political relationships and existing hierarchies. She calls for the promotion of ‘collective priorities and political voice, community self-organisation, peer support and solidarity to enhance the levels of inclusion and empowerment of marginalised groups and thereby improve democratic control over urban policy and planning’ (Mitlin, 2021, p. 3). In this respect, governmental promotion of active citizenship must not always be an instrumentalization of citizens and their capacities and competencies, but could also contribute to ‘summoning, constituting and supporting collective solidarities’ (Newman & Tonkens, 2011b, p. 221). Subsequently, questions related to how governments and administrations could acknowledge the importance of lived citizenship might foster the civic learning processes going along with practices of lived citizenship. This topic will be elaborated further in the empirical case study.

Civic learning

Learning through and for active citizenship

Acts of citizenship, including the activities of volunteers (both in the framework of established non-profit-organization and privately organized), foster several learning processes. This is especially true if they are performed in a group, and mainly take place informally – both during work and leisurely activities, in neighbourhoods, families, and between acquaintances. In many cases, personal, social and pedagogical competence,

practical skills in areas like project management, information and communication technologies, and other specialized knowledge is acquired (Kukovetz & Sprung, 2020; Duguid et al., 2013; Trumann, 2013; Foley, 1999).

Engaging in active citizenship presents a solid opportunity for civic learning. Active citizens may become aware of social, political and economic developments and take on new responsibilities in response to these. In this way, they foster their social and political consciousness (Trumann, 2013). The studies mentioned above elucidate how some people start their engagement within associations promoting predefined actions for good causes. As a result, the activists begin to pay more attention to changing political and social policies (Kukovetz & Sprung, 2020; Wlasak & Wonisch, 2019).

From a different angle, civic learning can promote active citizenship. It is helpful to use Gert Biesta's (2014) differentiation between a *socialization* and a *subjectification* concept of civic learning for the analysis of civic learning processes in the context of active citizenship. According to Biesta's theoretical approach, the acquisition of knowledge, skills and dispositions required 'to become part of an existing sociopolitical order' (Biesta, 2014, p. 6), means that civic learning takes place as *socialization*.

Educational processes might not only have the function of qualification – the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and dispositions to do *very specific things* – or of socialization in the above-mentioned sense, but also of 'subjectification' (Biesta, 2019, p. 14). From our point of view this third dimension is especially relevant for civic learning within active citizenship, as it describes how people 'become subjects of action and responsibility' (Biesta, 2019, p. 14). This concept is strongly linked to an understanding of education in the sense of the German notion of *Bildung* by Hans-Christoph Koller. *Bildung* means to be related to the world and to question the existing world orders (Koller, 2012). In Gert Biesta's description of human subjectivity, we also find a reference to the social/natural world. Biesta does not understand subjectivity as self-centred, but rather as taking responsibility for other human beings and existing in relation to the world (Biesta, 2019). He links the civic learning process as subjectification to his considerations relating to democracy. Therefore, he refers to Jacques Rancière and characterizes politics as always democratic, stating that political actions which imply the idea of equality interrupt existing social orders. Through these actions people engage with the so-called *experiment of democracy* (Biesta, 2014).

As we aim to include the perspective of lived citizenship, the everyday actions of people, we want to expand the concept of civic learning by Biesta. We argue, that subjectification may arise when personal experiences serve as the starting point. Firstly, concerning the *affective connectedness, Bildung* may happen, if people are emotionally involved (Dirkx, 2008) and if they are unsettled by their experiences (Schäfer, 2017). Secondly, people need a social environment, as in relationships to others, to learn – a need comparable to the necessity of *intersubjectivity* for engagement in lived citizenship. Finally, subjectification can be initiated by *performative* actions and conducted in public *spaces.* They have the potential to interrupt existing social practices.

Even though the experiences of marginalised people might be confined to the intimate and domestic sphere, civic learning presents a connection to others, or the public. We will therefore move on to explore the connections to public pedagogy.

Civic Learning of active citizens as public pedagogy

According to Gert Biesta (2012, 2019), public pedagogy can appear in three different forms. First, he names a pedagogy *for* the public, which aims to instruct citizens. This includes influencing the thinking, acts and existence of people. In terms of civic learning,

examples could be telling people how to act in law abiding or tolerant ways, or how to become active citizens.

Though this form of public pedagogy does not allow the promotion of pluralism and difference, it is more feasible in a so-called pedagogy *of* the public, meaning it is executed *by* the public itself. According to this, citizens should be empowered in their awareness of democratic processes and practices. People are not taught *what* they should learn, but a pedagogy *of* the public wishes *that* people acquire political agency and get active (Biesta, 2012, 2019). The downside of a pedagogy *of* the public is that it 'brings democracy under a 'regime' of learning' (Biesta, 2019, p. 138). That is, social and political problems are turned into learning problems and are no longer the responsibility of the collective, but rather the individuals (Biesta, 2019). Biesta (2012, 2019) refers to Paolo Freire (1970/1993) when he states that a pedagogy *of* the public seeks the *conscientization* of people. Agents of education act as facilitators and aim to build critical awareness and *critical consciousness* (Freire, 1970/1993).

In the third understanding of public pedagogy described by Biesta, pedagogy makes plurality of the people visible. Biesta states that in this 'mode' of public pedagogy it 'appears as an enactment of a concern for 'publicness' or 'publicity', that is a concern for the public quality of human togetherness and thus for the possibility of actors and events to *become public*.' (Biesta, 2012, p. 693). Biesta describes this form of public pedagogy as a rejection of both the logic of the market, and the private sphere. He refers to Marquand when he sees the domain of the market, characterized by trading interests and incentives, and the private domain of personal connection (Biesta, 2019). However, in the public sphere, the values of collective interest prevail over the values of self-interest and strangers come together as equal partners to discuss the definition of public interest and to produce public goods (Biesta, 2019). Thus, a public pedagogy is committed to solidarity, sustainability, cooperation and living together in plurality and difference. It *demonstrates* how alternatives to the logic of the market and the private can be put into practice, and therefore it can be called a 'pedagogy of demonstration' (Biesta, 2019, p. 139) that is entirely public.

This definition of public pedagogy, highlights active citizenship as a meaningful possibility for public pedagogy. Community learning und civic engagement care about well-being and social *togetherness,* and address topics such as freedom, democracy and human rights (Popović et al., 2018). Thus, they fit the idea of the third form of public pedagogy according to Gert Biesta. Popović et al. (2018) demonstrate that public pedagogy does not just mean turning public spaces into learning opportunities, but the focus has to lie on civic engagement: '(…) it is about collective action and civic initiative as the learning process itself' (Popović et al., 2018, p. 274).

One particular form of active citizenship, especially relevant for the project presented below and connected to the performative aspect of lived citizenship, can be described as 'artistic citizenship' (Caris & Cowell, 2016, p. 480). People are given the opportunity to 'manifest themselves as subjective members of society, to present themselves as citizens' (Caris & Cowell, 2016, p. 480) through art. This idea follows a concept of art that considers the situation itself, the interaction between the artist and the immediate surrounding, as artistic – a so-called *situation art*. The artist becomes an interlocutor who raises questions and allows the citizens to develop new ways of interventions and alternatives and thus to emerge as political subjects (Caris & Cowell, 2016). Arthur Caris and Gillian Cowell describe learning processes they found within projects of such situation art, as corresponding to the idea of learning as subjectification, as per Gert Biesta. This kind of public pedagogy opens up a public space that interrupts the rational

order, empowers people to speak with their own voice and generates social togetherness with the possibility of freedom within the community (Caris & Cowell, 2016).

These concepts of public pedagogy are not only fruitful for an analytic perspective, but also helpful both for policy makers and pedagogues, who initiate learning processes within civic engagement. In what follows, we will present a case study that we conducted in Graz, Austria in 2020/2021. It is a study of active citizenship and civic participation respectively, and it outlines political and pedagogical consequences.

A case study: Civic participation of migrants in Graz

In comparison to other EU or OECD countries, Austria has rather restrictive naturalization laws and provides few opportunities for formal political participation for newcomers. The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) points out that political participation for migrants in Austria is unfavourable as migrants 'have no voting rights, few local consultative bodies and weak support for immigrant organisations' (Solano & Huddleston, 2020a). Austria achieves only 20 out of 100 points on the index.

Against this background, we were interested in the question of how migrants, especially migrant women, develop political agency, despite the aforementioned conditions, and how they practice active – lived – citizenship in their local environment. The project will be described in greater detail after a more general exploration of political and civic participation in Graz.

Political and civic participation of migrants in Graz

The city of Graz, situated in south-eastern Austria, is continuously growing and had 291,134 inhabitants at the time of our empirical study (Land Steiermark, 2021). International migration has been changing the demographic structure of the city continuously for centuries. Over the last ten years, the percentage of people with a foreign citizenship of the total population of the city, increased from 14.9 % in 2011 to 24.6 % in 2021 (Land Steiermark, 2021). 31.2 % of the population were born outside Austria, and/or hold non-Austrian citizenship (Land Steiermark, 2021). Migrants – on average – are more likely to live under disadvantaged and precarious circumstances than people without a history of migration. Examples of this are a greater risk of unemployment (especially amongmigrant women), overrepresentation in low-income and precarious segments of the labour force, and an increased risk of poverty, as well as worse positions in the housing market (Statistik Austria, 2021).

Given that only residents of other EU countries can part take in municipal elections, one of the few opportunities of representation of citizens of non EU-countries is through what is known as the Migrants' Council of the City of Graz, established in 1995. The council advises local political and administrative bodies through recommendations and statements. It also provides information and services for migrant communities. The council has a total of nine representatives (of which currently eight identify as female) who are elected within the framework of the municipal council elections, by non-EU citizens. Since the Council has no decisive voice in political procedures, it has a rather limited scope of influence on city policies. The very low election turnout – under 5 % during the latest elections in 2021 – is likely a reflection of this problematic situation.

To expand democratic representation, the City of Graz has been working on developing further structures for the inclusion of its citizens, in planning and decision-making processes, and thus institutionalized various participation models over the past 50 years (Brunner, 2008).

These activities can be characterised as top-down processes of civic participation, and do not specifically address migrants, but rather the population as a whole. Civic participation in this context mainly concerns the field of urban development and urban planning.

Due to the lack of statistical data on the representation of migrants in relevant projects, we draw on expert interviews with three representatives of the Migrants' Council, the Department for Citizen Participation and the City Planning Department which we conducted in 2021 (in addition to the study presented below). All experts shared the impression that migrants have been underrepresented in participatory models. In most projects, the point of reference is a specific neighbourhood, and thus the immediate living environment of the residents. Not all citizens would accept an invitation to participate in public discussions to the same extent. Various factors seem to play a role here. In addition to general relevant aspects such as individual issues, or varying levels of education and socio-economic background, there may be additional barriers specific to citizens with a history of migration. Limited knowledge of the system, or a lack of fluency in German may contribute to this, but also a potentially precarious legal status, lack of trust in public institutions or little to no experience with citizen participation. A significant number of these processes take place in settings that can be inappropriate for some groups, such as information events held in large halls. The aforementioned disadvantages such as a lack of language skills and of cultural, social and symbolic capital, may have an even greater impact in these large settings. Past experiences of the interviewees show how the Migrants' Council can play an important role in bridging top-down approaches with more accessible modes of participation in city projects. Accessibility could be improved by adjusting the information to better fit the target group, identifying potential social multipliers and participants and inviting them personally, but also by providing translation services and smaller venues in order to create safe spaces for discussion. Women with migrant backgrounds in particular, are underrepresented in public spaces compared to men, they therefore require more specialised approaches to be developed to be successfully reached.

Apart from the rather formalized and top-down model described above, there is of course a range of more or less informal ways for citizens to participate. Self-organized initiatives use a variety of paths to articulate their concerns to the city's decision makers. Some of them also gain the support of official bodies, for example in the form of an invitation to introduce themselves on the homepage of the Department for Citizen Participation, or on the homepage of the Migrant's Council. None of the 30 initiatives listed on the Department for Citizen Participation indicate the promotion of women's concerns specifically, as their goal, and only one of the 60 migrant (self-)organisations listed on the homepage of the Migrant's Council indicates a focus on women in their name.

Against this background we will now highlight a project, in which we tried to create a more open and experimental space for exploring active citizenship and articulating ideas for urban changes by female residents, in a district with a high percentage of migrants.

'Active Urban Citizenship' – a project at the intersection of art, civic learning and research

In 2019, the city government of Graz invited artists, as well as representatives from the scientific community and civil society, to submit proposals for the contribution to a *Cultural Year 2020*[3]. The public call for proposals had a motto 'How we want to live'. We felt inspired to address specific social groups whose voices are often unheard and highlight the extent to which these groups can engage and put forward their ideas for

(co-)shaping their living space. We were particularly interested in how active citizenship is articulated against the backdrop of social change through migration. To address this, we suggested the project 'Active Urban Citizenship' (01/2020-04/2021) and invited female citizens to participate in a specific setting.

Subsequently, a group of thirteen women with a wide range of personal backgrounds (the majority, but not all, had migrant experiences) explored their urban district and shared ideas and utopias with regard to their living environment in a so-called 'living lab' (Malmberg & Vaittinen, 2017). Together with two artists, the women created a photo exhibit which was presented to the public in shop windows in March and April of 2021. The living lab (four workshops in total) was accompanied by a research team. Our leading research questions addressed the visions of the participants in terms of engaging politically within the local community and explored how the women negotiated ideas, roles and relationships of power within the group. Furthermore, we were interested in the potential of participatory, art-based methods to facilitate learning processes in the context of active citizenship. The mixed-methods research design included theoretical analysis and the following empirical survey methods:

- a standardized short questionnaire on the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants
- participatory, open observations of group work and discussions in the workshops, these were documented in observation protocols
- a photo-voice survey (Kolb & Lorenz, 2009) based on the participants' photographs in the district, their talking about their photos, and on recorded conversations that took place during the joint city walks
- a group discussion in the last workshop, in which the entire process was reflected upon
- the intermediate results of the analysis were presented to the participants and their feedback was then incorporated into the final analysis.

The theoretical framework of our research was based on theories and concepts around active (urban) citizenship (Wenke & Kron, 2019; Isin & Nielsen, 2008), civic learning and learning that takes place in social movements (Biesta, 2014; Duguid et al., 2013) as outlined above, in the first part of this paper.

The living lab connected the private experiences of its participants, experiences of personal significance, with the public space and dimensions of active citizenship. The women in the living lab experienced the intersection of four dimensions of lived citizenship according to Kallio et al. (2020). They mapped the places in the district (see Figure 1), marking positive or negative moments/happenings as remembered, they then visited these in groups and talked both during the walks, and in the workshop setting that followed, about their emotional connectedness to these places.

Figure 1. Activity within the Living Lab: Mapping the district. Source: Maryam Mohammadi

In doing this, the *spatial* dimension of their lived citizenship was brought to the fore. Multiple women mentioned the traffic situation, and how they felt discriminated against or even threatened as pedestrians. Furthermore, they articulated a need for safer and more comfortable bus stops: ‘The situation at the many bus stops is totally uncomfortable with all the cars directly there, a very small sidewalk, no shade at all, and then you are standing there with little children.’ (woman MAN, workshop [ws] 2[4]). In discussing their needs and emotions in connection with certain issues and places in the city, the *affective* aspects of being a citizen became visible. The women talked about their positive experiences with local NGOs and community centres in the area, where they liked to go to meet new friends, take language or sport classes and participate in dance festivals during summer. The *performative* dimensions of citizenship were demonstrated through taking ownership of their district, and by creating a public exhibit to reflect their utopias. To illustrate this, one object from the exhibit is depicted here (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Exhibit within the project. Source: Allison Geissler, in cooperation with Maryam Mohammadi and Kate Howlett Jones

Wenn jede eine kleine Änderung macht, folgen große Änderungen.

Ein Projekt im Rahmen von Graz Kulturjahr 2020

GRAZ UNSER KULTURJAHR 2020

Foto und Text: Allison Geissler, in Zusammenarbeit mit Maryam Mohammadi und Kate Howlett-Jones

https://active-urban-citizenship.uni-graz.at

The statement below the photo states: 'If every individual makes a small change, big changes will follow'. This demonstrates the core idea of our project – creating and discussing alternative outcomes of urban development (utopian visions), and thinking about how residents can actively involve themselves. Furthermore, the results of the process itself were also intended to inspire dialogues with the broader public, by creating a public exhibit open to visitors from the district and beyond. One woman reflected on the exhibit in the following words:

> We were bringing awareness to changes taking place in Graz. So, like this project, for me it was super, because it brings awareness (…) And the pictures, they are a universal language (…) and how we can bring a positive change. (woman BON, ws 4).

Finally, the fourth dimension of lived citizenship, *intersubjectivity,* played an important role within the group of women. Characterized by various common needs, but also by heterogeneous backgrounds (such as age, educational and social background, language skills, legal status, parenthood, etc.) the group atmosphere remained open and respectful in the living lab. The power structures and hierarchies, rooted in the structures of society at large, were to some extent reflected in the interactions of the participants. Visible, for example, as a hierarchy of language use and the privileged role of Austrian-born women with native language skills. However, working in smaller groups and using creative and non-verbal artistic methods provided marginalized participants a greater chance of equal inclusion. Plurality (in various respects) is vital to democratic processes, it should not be forgotten though, that plurality often is intertwined with inequalities, that also play out in groups of volunteers and active citizens. Therefore, it was interesting for us to understand how the participants negotiate and cope with these differences, and what role the facilitators can/should play in reducing potential barriers and enable equal participation in the process.

As we have pointed out the participants of this project realized all four dimensions of lived citizenship. A multitude of civic learning processes affiliated with these actions took place during our project. The women expressed their wishes, their negative experiences, and their own ideas of opportunities to change the district. Articulating not only needs, but also critique can, contribute effectively to a process of empowerment among marginalized people. Marginalized communities are rarely ever asked what they do not like or wish to change in their living space. Their voices tend to remain unheard – be it due to their legal status or other aspects of marginalization. This is perhaps one of the most important points with regards to civic learning, based on lived citizenship, as a process of subjectification. The activities within the living lab showed the women that they themselves *have the right to* and *are able to* criticize and actively engage in the development of the district. One participant reasoned that working together as a group gave the individuals a 'stronger power for change' (woman TAS, ws 4[3]). As these changes do not concern the individuals, but rather the responsibility for others, these processes of subjectivation are part of an active engagement in democracy. This is expressed by one woman, who summarised her experiences in the last workshop:

> A steady drip wears away the stone, so if you really want something, then you can change something. Yes, and different women with a lot of similarities, what does that mean for you? I found it extremely exciting to work in such an intercultural group, to get to know different views, perspectives and ways of thinking a little and to look beyond my own nose. That's my opinion. (woman BEZ, ws 4[3])

Active citizenship itself presents an opportunity to learn. The ambivalence of the project due to its framework (financed by the local government and developed and initiated by

researchers and an NGO) on the one hand, and its open orientation toward the utopian ideas of the participants and the forms of representation of these ideas on the other hand, is interesting. It places the project somewhere between a governmental strategy of fostering active citizenship, and bottom-up *acts of citizenship*. Thus, the project includes aspects of both a pedagogy *of* the public by aiming at promoting the (political) agency of the participants and setting the framework for it, and a pedagogy with a concern for 'publicness' resp. a 'pedagogy of demonstration' (Biesta, 2019, p. 139) fostering 'artistic citizenship' (Caris & Cowell, 2016, p. 480) by providing the women with resources to create their own utopia of their neighbourhood.

If it can be assumed that active urban citizenship is deeply connected to the daily lives and experiences of people in the city, lived citizenship highlights the contribution of personal actions within the domestic sphere to an extensive understanding of active citizenship. This is enmeshed with (feminist) politics of everyday life, that 'challenges definitions of what is properly a personal matter and what is a matter for public debate and collective provision, drawing attention to the public value created by informal labour in family, civil society and community' (Newman & Tonkens, 2011b, p. 224). Even though this seems to conflict with Gert Biesta's argumentation of a public pedagogy, which focuses on the aim of *becoming public*, we think that the concept of *lived citizenship* may be helpful in describing different levels of issues, predominantly framed as private, that could be rendered relevant for a public debate. In order to exert active citizenship, it is essential that there are public spaces where citizens have the opportunity to articulate and express themselves, speak with their own voices, and experience the creation of social movements and formulate political demands.

Conclusion

This paper asked how civic learning processes can take place within active citizenship and participatory processes – especially in the case of (often) marginalized groups such as migrant women. Applying a feminist perspective, together with the concept of *lived citizenship* (Lister, 2007), we analysed the case study of the Austrian City of Graz, focusing on institutionalized possibilities for the participation of migrants, as well as trying out new forms of artistic, active citizenship together with migrant women. With the living lab, our project 'Active Urban Citizenship' sought to provide a space to enable these patterns of active citizenship. In order to make the living lab as inclusive and accessible as possible, an inclusive, experimental and creative methodology and a continuous awareness and reflexion of existing hierarchies as well as different privileges of the participants, were crucial.

However, there is a need for more resources, including space and time for experimenting with new forms of civic learning, and enabling new approaches to active citizenship for marginalized groups. Furthermore, the learning outcome of such processes, in the sense of public pedagogy, must be included in reforming urban policy structures. On the one hand, the city itself must provide such opportunities, to experiment with new forms of citizenship, on the other hand, the demands and claims of bottom-up initiatives must be heard and considered by the city on a regular and institutionalized basis.

In general, we can say that the City of Graz has developed a variety of top-down urban structures and approaches to promote active citizenship. However, Graz still struggles to be inclusive (with regards to migrants and in particular migrant women), socially just, and to demonstrate the ability to respond to claims, rather than asking for active input by citizens. In addition, the City of Graz occasionally, but not systematically,

funds possibilities – such as one off projects – to present possibilities for civic learning through active citizenship. The challenge of working on more inclusive and sustainable concepts of participation and civic learning, in which marginalized groups can participate despite their legal and national status or their socio-economic situation remain as issues, as do access to resources and gender related positions in society. Citizens with migrant backgrounds in particular, especially women, are often left out, due to the barriers they face, such as deficits in information, socio-structural disadvantages, or the limited scope of impact that result from the possibilities for participation given to migrants.

Even if these aspects were addressed, the dilemma resulting from the democracy-promoting aspect of active citizenship and the peril of governmental instrumentalizations of active engagement, in the sense of privatising formerly public services and incorporating ideas and strategies of active citizens, persists. In the latter case it is again the active – or, as per Isin, *activist* – citizens who are challenged to point to respective developments.

However, the right to vote for non-national citizens remains one of the main challenges to recognition as active citizens, with the same rights as any other urban resident. To be acknowledged in this respect opens the doors to feeling entitled to one's city, enhances the development of a sense of ownership and encourages people to perform as active citizens. As cities grow due to migration, and urbanisation continues across the world, cities cannot afford to leave out crucial population groups in their urban development strategies, if they are committed to providing needs-based urban structures in a democratic and inclusive political system.

Notes

[1] We use the term *migrants* instead of *immigrants*, because in the German speaking context this term also highlights aspects of transmigration.

[2] https://mipex.eu

[3] Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, most of the funded projects were finally realized in 2021.

[4] Translation from German by the authors.

Declaration of conflicting interests

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

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank the reviewers for their support to improve the paper.

References

Bee, C. (2017). *Active Citizenship in Europe: Practices and Demands in the EU, Italy, Turkey and the UK*. Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Biesta, G. (2012). Becoming public: public pedagogy, citizenship and the public sphere. *Social & Cultural Geography, 13*(7), 683-697. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2012.723736

Biesta, G. (2014). Learning in public places. Civic learning for the Twenty-First Century. In G. Biesta, M. DeBie, & D. Wildemeersch (Eds.), *Civic learning, democratic citizenship and the public sphere* (pp. 1-11). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-7259-5_1

Biesta, G. (2019). *Obstinate Education. Reconnecting School and Society*. Brill Sense.

Biesta, G., DeBie, M., & Wildemeersch, D. (Eds.). (2014). *Civic Learning, Democratic Citizenship and the Public Sphere*. Springer.

Bollow, E., Faasch, H., Möller, A., Newig, J., Michelsen, G., & Rieckmann, M. (2014). Kommunikation, Partizipation und digitale Medien [Communication, participation and digital media]. In H. Heinrichs & G. Michelsen (Eds.), *Nachhaltigkeitswissenschaften* (pp. 369-426). Springer.

Bosniak, L. (2006). *The Citizen and the Alien. Dilemmas of contemporary membership*. Princeton University Press.

Brunner, F. (2008). Planungswerkstatt. Zeit für Graz. BürgerInnenbeteiligung im Rahmen der Werkstatt Graz [Planning workshop. Time for Graz. Citizen participation as part of the Graz workshop]. *Grazer Mitteilungen der Geographie und Raumforschung GeoGraz*, *42*, 16-19.

Caris, A., & Cowell, G. (2016). The artist can't escape: The artist as (reluctant) public pedagogue. *Policy Futures in Education*, *14*(4), 466-483. https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210316633379

Dirkx, J. M. (2008). The Meaning and Role of Emotions in Adult Learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Learning*, *120*, 7-18. https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.311

Duguid, F., Mündel, C., & Schugurensky, D. (2013). *Volunteer work, informal learning and social action*. Sense Publishers.

Eurostat. (2017). *Migrant integration – 2017 edition*. Publications Office of the European Union.

Fleischmann, L., & Steinhilper, E. (2017). The Myth of Apolitical Volunteering for Refugees. German Welcome Culture and a New Dispositif of Helping. *Social Inclusion, 5*(3), 17-27. https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v5i3.945

Foley, G. (1999). *Learning in Social Action. A Contribution to Understanding Informal Education*. Zed Books London.

Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum. (Original work published 1970)

Giugni, M., & Grasso, M. (2021). Citizenship and migration: mapping the terrain. In M. Giugni & M. Grasso (Eds.), *Handbook of Citizenship and Migration* (pp. 1-19). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Hanisch, C. (1970). The Personal is Political. In S. Firestone (Ed.). *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation* (pp. 76-78). Women's Liberation Movement Print Culture.

Isin, E. F. (2008). Theorizing acts of citizenship. In E. F. Isin & G. Nielsen (Eds.). *Acts of Citizenship* (pp. 15-43). Palgrave Macmillan.

Isin, E. F., & Nielsen, G. (Eds.). (2008). *Acts of citizenship*. Zed Books.

Kallio, K. P., Wood, B. E., & Häkli, J. (2020). Lived citizenship: conceptualising an emerging field. *Citizenship Studies, 24*(6), 713-729. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2020.1739227

Kolb, B, & Lorenz, L. S. (2009). Involving the public through participatory visual research methods. *Health Expectations 12*(3), 262-274. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1369-7625.2009.00560.x

Koller, H-C. (2012). *Bildung anders denken. Einführung in die Theorie transformatorischer Bildungsprozesse* [Thinking education differently. Introduction to the theory of transformative educational processes]. Kohlhammer.

Kukovetz, B., & Sprung, A. (2020). *Solidarität lernen (?). Das Potenzial freiwilligen Engagements für politische Bildungsprozesse in Migrationsgesellschaften* [Learning solidarity? The potential of volunteering for civic learning processes in migration societies]. Research Report. Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz.

Land Steiermark (Ed.). (2021). Wohnbevölkerung am 1.1.2021, Wanderungen 2020 [Resident population on 1.1.2021, migration 2020]. *Steirische Statistiken, Heft 6/2021*.

Lister, R. (2007). Inclusive Citizenship: Realizing the Potential. *Citizenship Studies, 11*(1), 49-61. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621020601099856

Lister, R., Williams, F., Anttonen, A., Bussemaker, J., Gerhard, U., Heinen, J., Johansson, S., Leira, A., Siim, B., Tobío, C., & Gavanas, A. (2007). *Gendering Citizenship in Western Europe.* The policy Press.

Malmberg, K., & Vaittinen, I. (Eds.) (2017). *Living lab methodology handbook*. https://zenodo.org/records/1146321

Mattijssen, T. J. M., Buijs, A. A. E., Elands, B. H. M., Arts, B. J. M., van Dam, R. I., & Donders, J. L. M. (2019). The Transformative Potential of Active Citizenship: Understanding Changes in Local Governance Practices. *Sustainability 11*, 5781. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11205781

Mitlin, D. (2021). *A framework to scale citizen participation in urban development: Learning from experiences of multi-stakeholder collaboration* [GDI Working Paper No. 2021-058]. The University of Manchester.

Newman, J. (2011). Mobilising the active citizen in the UK. Tensions, silences and erasures. In J. Newman & E. Tonkens (Eds.), *Participation, Responsibility and Choice. Summoning the Active Citizen in Western European Welfare States* (pp. 107-125). Amsterdam University Press.

Newman, J., & Tonkens, E. (2011a). Active Citizenship. Responsibility, choice and participation. In J. Newman & E. Tonkens (Eds.), *Participation, Responsibility and Choice. Summoning the Active Citizen in Western European Welfare States* (pp. 179-200). Amsterdam University Press.

Newman, J., & Tonkens, E. (2011b). Towards a feminist politics of active citizenship. In J. Newman & E. Tonkens (Eds.), *Participation, Responsibility and Choice. Summoning the Active Citizen in Western European Welfare States* (pp. 217-234). Amsterdam University Press.

Newman, J., & Tonkens, E. (Eds.). (2011c). *Participation, Responsibility and Choice. Summoning the Active Citizen in Western European Welfare States.* Amsterdam University Press.

Pietrzak-Franger, M., Pleßke, N., & Voigts, E. (2018). Transforming Cities: Discourses of Urban Change from Victorian London to Global Megacities – An Introduction. In M. Pietrzak-Franger, N. Pleßke & E. Voigts (Eds.), *Transforming Cities: Discourses of Urban Change* (pp. 7-26). Universitätsverlag Winter.

Popović, K., Maksimović, M., & Jovanović, A. (2018). Towards new learning environments – Collective civic actions as learning interventions in post-Communist Belgrade. *European Journal of Education*, *53*, 365-376. https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12288

Sassen, S. (2002). The Repositioning of Citizenship: Emergent Subjects and Spaces for Politics. *Berkeley Journal for Sociology*, *46*, 4-26. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41035566

Schilliger, S. (2018). Urban Citizenship. Teilhabe für alle - da, wo wir leben [Urban Citizenship. Participation for all – where we live]. In H. Aigner & S. Kumnig (Eds.), *Stadt für alle! Analysen und Aneignungen* (pp. 14-35). Mandelbaum Verlag.

Schäfer, A. (2017). *Einführung in die Erziehungsphilosophie* [Introduction to the philosophy of education]. Beltz Juventa.

Selle, K. (2013). *Über Bürgerbeteiligung hinaus: Stadtentwicklung als Gemeinschaftsaufgabe? Analysen und Konzepte* [Beyond citizen participation: urban development as a joint task? Analysis and concepts]. Springer Heidelberg

Solano, G., & Huddleston, T. (2020a). *Migrant Integration Policy Index 2020 – Austria.* https://mipex.eu/austria

Solano, G., & Huddleston, T. (2020b). *Migrant Integration Policy Index 2020 – Political participation.* https://mipex.eu/political-participation

Sprung, A., & Kukovetz, B. (2018). Refugees welcome? Active Citizenship und politische Bildungsprozesse durch freiwilliges Engagement. *Zeitschrift für Weiterbildungsforschung*, *41*(2-3), 227-240.

Statistik Austria (Ed.). (2021). *Migration & Integration*. Wien.

Trumann, J. (2013). *Lernen in Bewegung(en)* [Learning in movement(s)]. Transcript.

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2020). *World Cities Report 2020. The Value of Sustainable Urbanization*. https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/10/wcr_2020_report.pdf

Vanolo, A. (2016). Is there anybody out there? The place and role of citizens in tomorrow's smart cities, *Futures*, *82*, 26-36. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2016.05.010

Wenke, C., & Kron, S. (Eds.). (2019). *Solidarity Cities in Europe. Charity or Pathways to Citizenship*. Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung.

Wlasak, P., & Wonisch, K. (2021). Religiöse Motivation für freiwillige Flüchtlingshilfe: zwei lokale Fallstudien aus Österreich und Italien [Religious motivation in voluntary refugee aid: two local case studies in Austria and Italy]. In W. Sievers, R. Bauböck & C. Reinprecht (Eds.), *Jahrbuch Migrationsforschung 5. Flucht und Asyl. Internationale und österreichische Perspektiven* (pp. 75-93). Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

World Economic Forum. (2017). *Migration and Its Impact on Cities*. World Economic Forum.

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2025, pp. 39-57

Adult education, democracy, and totalitarianism: A case study of the German Democratic Republic (1949-1990)

Tetyana Hoggan-Kloubert
University of Augsburg, Germany (tetyana.kloubert@phil.uni-augsburg.de)

Chad Hoggan
North Carolina State University, USA (cdhoggan@ncsu.edu)

Nicole Luthardt
University of Augsburg, Germany (nicole.luthardt@phil.uni-augsburg.de)

Abstract

This article explores the role of adult education in supporting democracy through an examination of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) (1949-1990). This case study presents the institutional landscape, political regulations, and key trends of adult education in the GDR, complemented by insights from educators who worked within the field during the 1970s through 1990s. Two key categories emerge from the findings: (1) 'Learning society': Opportunities, access, and control of learning; and (2) Coexistence of conformity and resistance. Interviews highlight the diverse aspects of adult education in the GDR. While some programmes facilitated access to education, culture, and certain professions that would have otherwise been unattainable, the indoctrinative, centralised, and state-controlled education system promoted a predefined societal model and sought to mould a specific personality type, aligning with the vision of a totalitarian learning society, which clashes with the fundamental values of adult education and creates a contradictory situation for adult educators.

Keywords: democracy, indoctrination, resistance, GDR, authoritarianism

ISSN 2000-7426

© 2024 The authors
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/
http://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.4940
www.rela.ep.liu.se

Introduction

Democracy is always under threat, and lifelong civic learning is essential if it is to survive and function (Biesta, 2011; Dewey, 1916; Negt, 2010). To better understand the current precariousness of democracy, it is helpful to look at a previous instance when adult education served anti-democratic interests. In this article, the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), which existed from 1949 to 1990, will be presented as a case study. By examining the experiences of this particular *dictatorship under the guise of a democracy*, we address the role of adult education as a supporter of democracy or totalitarianism.

In characterising the GDR as a totalitarian state, we draw upon the influential definition of totalitarianism by Friedrich and Brzezinski (1965), who defined it by a six-point pattern: 1) an official ideology aspiring towards a utopian society, 2) a single hierarchical party, 3) a system of terror through secret police, 4) party control of mass communication, 5) party control of the military, and 6) central control of the entire economy (pp. 21-22). Accordingly, the characteristics of the GDR state structure qualify it as totalitarian. When we use the term 'indoctrination', we understand it as a systematic and deliberate strategy that employs specific doctrines and values to shape and control human behavior in predetermined ways, while disregarding the individual's autonomy and personal choice (Böhm & Seichter, 2018, p. 231).

This case study has two sources of data. First, drawing from historical accounts, we provide an overview of the institutional structures, political regulations, and key trends of adult education in the GDR. Second, data are presented from interviews we conducted with educators who worked in adult education in the GDR. By examining the experiences of these educators, we explore the complexities of adult education under a totalitarian regime and hope to contribute to a more nuanced view of the subject. The interview data are retrospective constructions characterised by selected memories and ex post facto interpretations (Hoggan-Kloubert, 2024); as such, they provide insights into the lived educational practice with 'a subjective refraction and processing' (Tietgens, 1993, p. 11; translated by the authors).

Drawing from the emancipatory tradition of adult education, which has its European roots in the Enlightenment and has been reinforced by critical theorists such as Horkheimer and Adorno (1947), we emphasize the need to continue the academic discourse regarding the values of adult education, such as autonomy, solidarity, and pluralism (Hufer, 2016; Hoggan-Kloubert & Hoggan, 2023). Additionally, this examination reinforces the importance of adult education's traditional commitment to democracy (Zeuner, 2010; Boggs, 1991) and the need for continued focus on these core principles in the development and implementation of adult education programs and policies.

Historical background

Adult education in Germany experienced growth during the Weimar Republic (1918-1933), which was the first attempt at republican democracy in German history. The government emphasized the importance of adult education by granting constitutional status (the first and to date only time) and invested in programs aimed at improving adult workers' education and job skills. Trade unions and political parties also offered adult education courses (Borinski & Friedenthal-Haase, 2014). During the Nazi dictatorship (1933-1945), there was a suppression of democratic adult education movements; nevertheless, the Weimar period marked a turning point in the development of adult education in Germany and laid the foundation for future growth.

After World War II, Germany was initially divided into four occupation zones (1945-1949) and then into two states. The Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) was established as a democratic government, rebuilt with the economic help of the Marshall Plan. Although people in West Germany cannot be said to have lived in a democratic or egalitarian utopia, they at least enjoyed freedom of speech, religion, and the press and elected their government through free and fair elections. East Germany, under Soviet control, became the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and, despite its name, was far from the characteristics of a democratic state. The one-party communist government monitored the population and did not tolerate dissent, with staged elections and only a facade of democracy (Jesse, 2005).

Initially, many adult education providers in the GDR sought to provide a more egalitarian system of education, in reaction to their view of the classist and fascist approaches of the Weimar and Nazi dictatorship regimes, respectively. The government, however, decided that such egalitarianism was best accomplished by using education to build the *perfect* society through the creation of a *socialist personality* and a culture of conformity. According to the definition in the GDR literature, adult education was intended:

> to continue the all-round development of personality, the ability to further develop the initiatives and creativity of all citizens, to deepen education and training, to impart and acquire knowledge of Marxism-Leninism and all other sciences, progressive tradition, and cultural values, to expand the interests and to develop socialist consciousness and socialist behavior. (Schneider et al., 1988, p. 9; translated by the authors)

Certainly, some core elements of this definition align with democratic concepts of adult education. The GDR's definition of adult education, however, placed a strong emphasis on inculcating a specific (i.e., Marxist-Leninist) ideology. The requirement to form a specific type of socialist consciousness highlights the political agenda behind the adult education programs in the GDR, which sought to control the thoughts and beliefs of the population. This use of adult education diverged from its more traditional conception following the legacies of the Enlightenment, which strove to support the development of democratic citizens through the promotion of free inquiry, personal growth, and the pursuit of knowledge and skills for their own sake (Deutscher Ausschuß für das Erziehungs- und Bildungswesen, 1960, p. 20).

To the extent that the GDR endorsed lifelong learning and personal development, it was only within the parameters of a structured state-guided system. The predominant focus on professional and academic qualifications for adults shaped the adult education landscape, with a tendency toward homogeneity and significant state intervention through educational policies. The state, in this context, did not allow for a personal or institutional autonomy in adult education, emphasizing instead a centralized and directed approach to learning and development (Knoll, 1999).

The GDR used adult education to shape the adults in its society. 'Their ways of thinking and behaving, their emotions and their will are influenced according to a given ideological norm' (Siebert, 1970, p. 148; translated by the authors). In cases where individuals deviated from the ideological norm, the goal was to change their consciousness and bring them back in line. According to Siebert (1970)[1], the GDR believed that people in a socialist society should never be released from the educational process at any stage of their lives (p. 149).

The content taught in adult education institutions was tightly controlled by the state, and it was deemed necessary for all teaching to conform to the state's ideology. Some adult education institutions faced criticism for not putting enough emphasis on the

ideological content. The *Volkshochschule* (VHS), or adult education centre, for example, was criticised at the 7th meeting of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) in 1952 for its lack of attention to 'the propagation of Marxism-Leninism' (Gutsche, 1958, p. 70; translated by the authors). Company Academies were also instructed to prioritise the integration of political education with their vocational education programmes. In 1968, there was a push to enhance the political and ideological integration across all subjects in adult education, as it was observed that there was an 'insufficient political and ideological penetration of all subjects' (Schröer, 1968, p. 486; translated by the authors).

The focus on continuous professional development was intertwined with continuous political education, which had two primary objectives: 'Education to love the GDR was linked to education to hate Western imperialism and the opposition in one's own country' (Siebert, 1970, p. 48; translated by the authors). The selection of content was based solely on the *social value* of the educational materials and the extent to which it fit into the politically-, economically-, and culturally-driven tasks that were deemed important. As Lehmann (1950) framed it, 'Supply and demand should not be decisive, but the question should be asked whether the intended material fits into the tasks that are politically, economically and culturally conditioned and promising' (as cited in Siebert, 1970, p. 49; translated by the authors). The study circle (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft*), a crucial form of dialogical work in adult education in the Weimar Republic, also faced distrust from the state structure in the GDR. Emmerling, the director of the *Volkshochschule* (VHS) in Halle, GDR, referred to the study circle as 'aimless debate' (Siebert, 1970, p. 81; translated by the authors).

Despite this forced service to an ideology, the first few years (1949-1955) of adult education in the GDR saw a willingness to experiment with different methods and organisations (Siebert, 1970, p. 41). The adult education system was tasked with instilling the new ideology and a corresponding work ethic in the population of the GDR through re-qualifications, new qualifications, and continuing professional education. The need for state control overshadowed the more innovative and participant-oriented didactics, and as a result, adult education and professional development increasingly took the form of knowledge transmission, with long-term courses and standardised curricula replacing the study circle as a form of learning.

This approach deviated from the principles of democratic adult education in several significant ways. First, the system subscribed to the belief that individuals required guidance throughout their lives and were malleable, with educational goals being exclusively determined by society and the state rather than also with the learners themselves (Friedenthal-Haase, 2000, p. ix). Second, education was frequently intertwined with propaganda, with the principle of voluntary participation often disregarded, as demonstrated by the requirement for participation in political events (Siebert, 1970, p. 329). Finally, education was reduced to ideological training, with a focus on prescribed (ideological) content transmission.

Institutions of adult education in the GDR

The examination of institutional frameworks in adult education within the GDR is extensively chronicled through the substantial contributions of Siebert (1970; 2001), Knoll (1990) and Opelt (2004, 2005). More concise overviews by Olbertz (1994) and Trier (2010) offer additional perspectives on the educational landscape in the GDR. The commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Volkshochschulen (VHS) in Germany prompted numerous publications on institutional history (e.g., Klemm et al., 2019;

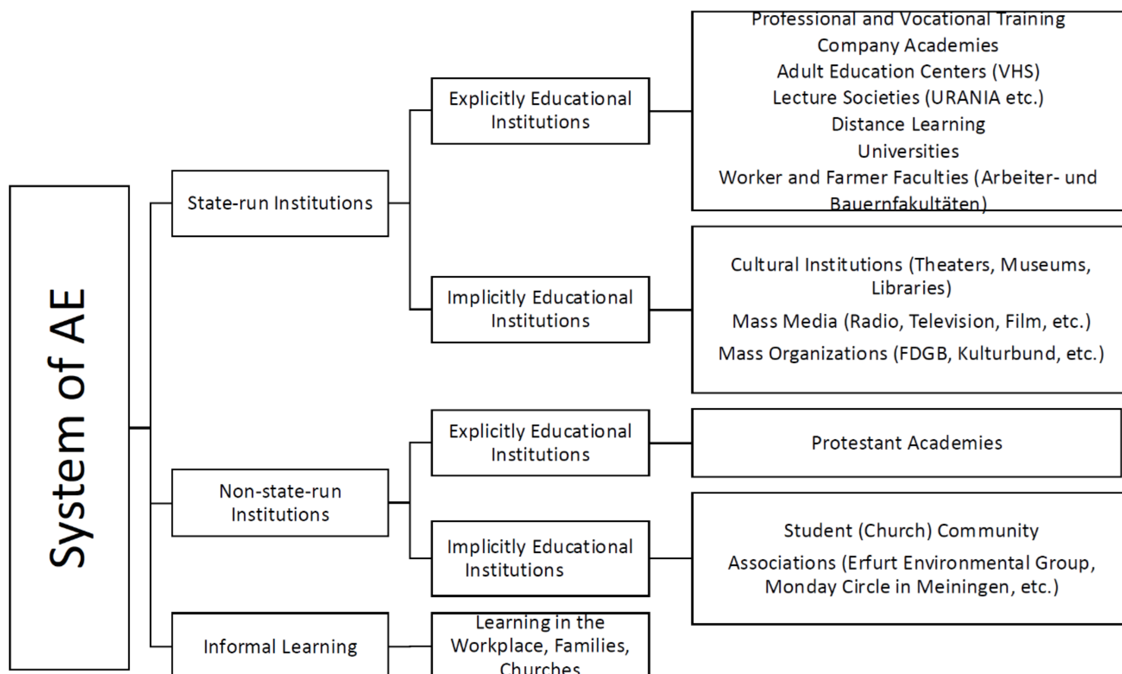
Meilhammer, 2019). Although this article cannot provide an exhaustive picture of adult education in the GDR, it seeks to highlight certain tensions, challenges, and pitfalls inherent in the landscape of adult education within a totalitarian regime.

Adult education in the GDR had a political and ideological orientation towards the Soviet Union. In 1946, the first (and also last) joint conference of all German adult education centre directors took place in Berlin. Siebert (1970) reasons that the personal contacts at that time were still quite intensive and based on relationships from the Weimar Republic (p. 33); however, the internal German technical communication had decreased significantly with the new course of the GDR. The ideologization and state control of learning meant that VHS in the GDR could hardly be compared with the institutions of the same name in West Germany; the ones in the GDR were more like the evening schools based on the Soviet model (p. 65).

Even if the institutional landscape in the GDR was essentially the same as in West Germany (e.g., Volkshochschulen, university continuing education, academies), there were still significant differences in the content, didactics, and ideological orientations of education. All educational work in the GDR was subordinated to the stately ideological doctrine and standardised in terms of educational theory (Siebert, 1970). With the enactment of the 'Law on a Unified Socialist Education System' (Gesetz über das einheitliche sozialistische Bildungssystem, 1965), the nationalisation and centralisation of adult education and its integration into the public education system was cemented.

The nationalisation of the adult education system in the GDR had at least one advantage: adult education was systematically expanded and developed into a comprehensive network. The effort was far-reaching, as the GDR targeted educational programs to societal groups that today are considered to be remote from education. Indeed, the scope and reach of adult education in the GDR has seldom been matched in any country. The following Figure 1 summarizes the wide range of programs and structures of education for adults that were offered at some point during the time period 1949-1990.

Figure 1. Systems of Adult Education in the GDR. Source: Authors' own figure



Volkshochschule

The *Volkshochschule* or VHS, which was established as a model of adult education at the beginning of the 20th century, was designed after the Danish system and experienced a time of flourishing in the Weimar Republic (1918-1933). The VHS were re-established after World War II, but in the GDR the institution abandoned its original mission, which had been as a school of democracy for everyone, tasked with 'educating the population in the spirit of democracy, anti-fascism and anti-militarism' (Siebert, 1970, p. 26; translated by the authors). Under the GDR, the VHS was subject to state control in all central areas, especially curriculum planning and instructor selection. The re-connection to the democratic tradition of the Weimar Republic was criticised and dismissed by the GDR officials and researchers. The educators of the Weimar Republic were acknowledged for having 'occasionally also brought well-considered ideas with them', but the new iteration of the VHS was able to overcome the 'unacceptable part of the legacy … relatively quickly and generally painlessly' (Emmerling, 1958, pp. 80-81; translated by the authors). Hence, the traditions of the Weimar Republic were discussed as lines of continuity in the early years, but the advocates of this legacy (the so-called reactionaries) were quickly silenced by the new party officials. The Soviet Military Administration in Germany's Order No. 22, decreed in 1946, demonstrates a deliberate break with the tradition of the Weimar Republic in terms of education policy. Central principles of adult education such as liberal values and subsidiarity were legally dissolved in favour of centralisation and nationalisation, and the so-called open event program (*offenes Veranstaltungsprogramm*) was also regulated (cf. Opelt, 2004, pp. 137-147). In 1949, the VHS was restructured into an evening high school for adults and adapted to the Soviet model.

On September 11, 1948, a 'work plan for adult education centres in Germany's Soviet Zone for 1948 to 1950' was published by the (East) German Administration for Public Education. Special emphasis was placed on an ideological orientation, which is visible in new innovations: 'Working groups for special questions of scientific socialism' were to be instituted, new materials on political-economic topics were to be developed, and lecturers in social sciences were to attend special advanced training courses to be ideologically prepared for their work (Arbeitsplan der VHSn der SBZ Deutschland für 1948-1950, as cited in Siebert, 1970, p. 30; translated by the authors). The directors, together with the Council of Teachers (*Dozentenrat*), were to develop work plans for their institutions, which then had to be approved by the Administration for Popular Education (Verwaltung für Volksbildung) (Siebert, 1970, p. 31). As illustrated by Gieseke and Opelt (2003) and Opelt (2004), the VHS constantly encountered limitations on its programmatic orientation and autonomous functioning. These constraints were imposed to fulfil pre-defined political objectives set by the state. Nevertheless, some VHS offered a selection of general education courses from the 1970s onwards, which corresponded to 'their classic traditional program offerings in the Weimar Republic' (Opelt, 2004, p. 218; translated by the authors).

Company Academies

Company Academies (*Betriebsakademien*) were institutions of adult education offering a solution to the shortage of workers after the war. They played a decisive role in continuing professional education and evening schools, which were important for updating educational qualifications. One innovation of the Company Academies was a tiered qualification system, which at the time of its creation in 1960 was progressive and

unique in Europe. This system provided that 'each section of the further training was designed as a basis for the next one, so that transitions were possible without an entrance examination' (Olbertz, 1994, p. 302; translated by the authors). For this purpose, framework curricula were developed 'which should ensure the comparability of the requirements and at the same time enable flexible adaptation to the respective operational requirements' (Siebert, 2001, p. 278; translated by the authors). During full-time employment, it was possible to advance from unskilled labour to university graduate. The orientation of the content changed again accordingly: the content of the qualification measures were not only the specific requirements of the job, but also contained overarching (political, ideological) priorities, detached from the immediate job requirements. It should be noted that access to the respective qualification measures was not open to everyone. Participation was only possible by selection, and only politically loyal employees were selected. Once selected, however, participation was mandatory. There were few options in terms of content. From the point of view of the companies, participation in educational programs had to align with the planned 'production and workforce planning' (Bramer, 1991, p. 424; translated by the authors).

Cultural centres and clubs

The goal of developing 'good state citizens' could not be realised without an extensive system of adult education, including both non-institutionalised (e.g., television, radio, libraries, museums) and institutionalised (Gesetz über das einheitliche sozialistische Bildungssystem, 1965) programs. The understanding of education 'in the collective and by the collective for conscious civic and moral behaviour' applied not only to children and young people, but also to vocational training and further education (Ramm, 1990, p. 42; translated by the authors). Accordingly, state-organised adult education in the GDR was characterised by various legal norms, leading to a 'centralistic and also dirigistic power of disposal over the educational system' (Knoll & Siebert, 1968, p. 36; translated by the authors).

Cultural centres and clubs (*Klub- und Kulturhäuser*), which historically provided various forms of cultural education, also became closely linked to the political vision of the state. Due to the restructuring of the VHS, the range of cultural education offerings narrowed, and new forms of institutionalised cultural adult education were developed. As early as the 1950s, cultural centres were spread in rural communities, where gatherings, meetings, training sessions, courses, and lectures took place. In December 1953, these cultural centres were subordinated to the Free German Trade Union Federation (FDGB) (Siebert, 1970, p. 283). In 1954, the FDGB published guidelines for educational content and activities in all trade union culture houses, clubs, culture rooms (red corners), and libraries. In addition to such recreational activities as concerts, theatre performances, dances, excursions, and sightseeing, political education was offered to 'strengthen confidence in the policies of the government and the party of the working class' through lectures, films, and exhibitions (Gutsche, 1958, p.118; translated by the authors).

As part of this work, the 'ideological-artistic level' of the folk-art groups were to be increased through 'regular rehearsals' or 'intensive training work' (Gutsche, 1958, p. 118; translated by the authors). Over time, these clubhouses and culture houses as institutions of cultural mass education continued to develop, as did the scope of the events (from approximately 320,000 participants in 1970 to almost 800,000 in 1988) and the number of visitors (from 35,000 in 1970 to almost 75,000 in 1988) (Staatliche Zentralverwaltung für Statistik, 1989, p. 322). The club- and culture houses served a 'comparatively large

majority and not a socially exclusive elite' (Siebert, 1970, p. 121; translated by the authors).

Gieseke and Opelt (2003) highlight the impressiveness of cultural education in the GDR, citing the abundance and diversity of programs and topics (p. 98). However, they emphasize that this diversity primarily revolved around 'classical high culture' (p. 198), due to its perceived lack of oppositional potential. It was a form of cultural education not geared toward fostering critical reflection on the culture in the society but rather towards adherence to a classical tradition. Even though it aimed to bridge the cultural gap between elites and the working class (p. 277), it fell short in providing a platform for reflection. Importantly, Gieseke and Opelt (2003) note that 'a vibrant culture can only develop when it rubs against the societal present' (p. 277; translated by the authors); cultural development thrives through interaction with the open present social environment. In the context of the GDR, this essential interaction was lacking.

Protestant Academies

The only institutions relatively critical towards the state were the Protestant Academies (*Evangelische Akademien*). Friedenthal-Haase (2007) describes these as 'principally different' (p. 429; translated by the authors) from the state-controlled adult education institutions of the GDR. Although tolerated by the state, they remained under constant surveillance. In individual cases, the lecturers and participants were intimidated – through 'defamation, intimidation and persecution of individuals' (p. 430; translated by the authors). These academies tried to follow the traditions of the popular education movement of the Weimar period, yet, because public funding and advertising for these activities were prohibited, the popularity of the Protestant Academies began to decline from the mid-1960s (Rothe, 2003, p. 269). Anti-church propaganda and secularization processes in the GDR contributed to this. Rothe (2003) points out that marginalisation prompted an upsurge in creative forms of work and new content; the church institutions developed a niche form for a culture of critical dialogue, which stood in contrast to the propaganda training practices of the state institutions. Their didactic-methodical norm was one of 'openness, genuine voluntariness and freedom' (Friedenthal-Haase, 2007, p. 435; translated by the authors). Participation required certain prerequisites (e.g., self-educational ability and willingness, critical thinking, a perceived belonging to or acceptance of the church), but also a willingness to accept certain disadvantages (e.g., defamation, intimidation, persecution) (p. 430). The existence of such an educational institution offered a feeling of solidarity and empowerment for critical, active minorities, but also a 'system acceptance with reservations' (Friedenthal-Haase, 2007, p. 435; translated by the authors) – a pressure release valve, wherein oppressive structures of the GDR could be criticised, but not in a way that any change was likely to result.

This overview reveals a differentiated picture of adult education in the GDR. In addition to indoctrinative education, there were programs that made it easier for many participants to gain access not only to education and culture (Gieseke & Opelt, 2003), but also to certain professions that otherwise would not have been possible (Friedenthal-Haase, 2007; Opelt, 2004). While there were attempts to organise educational opportunities that operated outside the realm of state control (e.g., Protestant Academies), it is undeniable that the education system was centralised and controlled by the state. Educational programmes and organised leisure activities were to be carried out uniformly (in terms of content and methods), and the targeted selection only of loyal groups and individuals for certain educational opportunities ensured a measure of loyalty to the

system, whether through the creation of dependency or through guaranteed privileges (Hoggan-Kloubert & Luthardt, 2022).

Participants in adult education in the GDR

The GDR, as a new nation state, faced the challenge of finding suitable specialists, in both professional and ideological respects. According to the state doctrine, a 'new intelligentsia' should come primarily from among the workers and farmers, for which purpose the worker and farmer faculties (Arbeiter- und Bauernfakultäten) were established at various universities (Miethe, 2007). To foster the 'new socialist personality' and to cultivate individuals who embraced the Marxist-Leninist worldview, the regime aimed to provide access to university studies in specialized preparatory institutions for those talented individuals who demonstrated unwavering political loyalty (Siebert, 1970, p. 42). Those institutions sought to shape the new 'all-round developed socialist personality' capable of 'building socialism' and embracing a 'broad cultural horizon' (Lemke, 1980, p. 22; translated by the authors).

Worth mentioning are the numerous initiatives to use mass media for cultural and professional education. As early as 1949, the Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk broadcasting network began airing the 'Funkhochschule' (Wireless University). The programs were a prescribed part of the obligatory discussion rounds at the VHS, the FDJ (The Free German Youth, a communist youth organisation) and the FDGB (The Free German Trade Union Confederation) (Siebert, 1970, p. 43).

In addition to the workers and farmers, other target groups were also the focus of educational efforts. Adult education centres held regular seminars for parents, with the aim of ensuring uniform ideological education at school and at home (Siebert, 1970, p. 44). From the point of view of the state apparatus, the lecturers in adult education also needed additional special pedagogical qualifications so that 'capable skilled workers, administrative employees, teachers, intellectuals and officials of the parties and mass organizations (could) be systematically prepared for their work as adult education centre lecturers through courses on technical, social and methodological questions' with special focus was placed on 'activist training', that would increase enthusiasm for work and political ideology in work collectives (Direktorenkonferenz in Thüringen, 1950, as cited in Siebert, 1970, pp. 49-50; translated by the authors). The lack of qualified workers led to an increased focus on women's qualifications; women were expected, under the mantra of equal rights, to take up work in industry, agriculture, and educational professions.

Adult education in the GDR from the perspective of practitioners

To supplement our understanding of adult education during the important historical epoch of the GDR, we gathered subjective perspectives, personal experiences, and reflections from adult education practitioners who worked in the GDR during the period between 1949 and 1990. The following section describes essential features of the data collection process and then presents relevant findings.

A purposive sample of six individuals, recruited through social networks, was selected for this study based on their experiences of having worked in adult education in the GDR. The sample consisted of three men and three women, who were between 65 and 80 years old when the interviews were conducted in 2022. The range of institutions described above (i.e., VHS, university further education, cultural education, church education) were represented. As this study sought to understand the experiences and perspectives of individuals from the former GDR, qualitative interviews were chosen as

the primary method of data collection, as they provide an in-depth exploration of personal experiences and are well suited for exploring sensitive topics (Flick, 2019). The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and voluntarily agreed to participate. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, and they were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants, and all audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored and protected.

Semi-structured qualitative interviews of approximately two hours in length were conducted with each participant. These interviews were conducted in German and held via Zoom. The interview questions were open-ended and flexible, allowing for the participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives in their own words. These discussions were recorded and transcribed, after which we used a thematic analysis approach to identify common themes and patterns (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). The analysis was performed by two independent coders and checked for inter-rater reliability. The results of the analysis were compared and discussed to arrive at a final set of themes and patterns that we felt would accurately represent the experiences and perspectives of the participants. Quotations selected for inclusion in this article were translated by us into English.

The statements made in the interviews represent perspectives that are subjective and biographical, and which have been reassessed by distance in time and social and political situations since the fall of the GDR. Their experiences as learners and later as educators ensured, we hoped, that they possessed a sound understanding of adult education as a profession, encompassing its underlying theories and practical implementation. Consequently, their responses were informed by an expert's viewpoint on adult education, rendering their insights invaluable in shedding light on the nuances of the educational landscape during that period.

Among the findings are two relevant themes: (1) 'Learning society': Opportunities, access, and control of learning; and (2) Coexistence of conformity and resistance. These themes are explored more fully below.

'Learning society': Opportunities, access, and control of learning

The interviewees described attempts of the GDR to create an institutional, legal-financial framework and a general 'learning climate' (Eduard, line 105) in the country, with various learning incentives to ensure lifelong learning of its citizens and thereby shape learners into the ideal socialist personality. Alongside their perceived need – and even 'hunger' (Sylvia, lines 17, 54) – for education, participants also spoke of the compulsion to learn (in the workplace, as well as in political and ideological training courses). On the one hand, participants talked about how the system of learning for adults in the GDR was institutionally diversified and had low barriers to entry for many groups (through e.g., learning on the job, educational leave, paid educational offerings), but on the other hand, access to adult education, workplace training, and higher education was linked to one's loyalty to the state ideology rather than to one's own achievements, educational needs, or interests.

> There were many visa applications [to West Germany]. These lists were counter-checked by our manager [at the VHS]. Who is the applicant? For courses such as English or mechanical engineering, we checked for those [who applied for a visa], and they would not be admitted. (We would tell them that) the course was full or distributed differently. [...] It was the same with the [post-high school diploma], without a referral there was no place at the Volkshochschule. It wasn't that easy. […] Applicants have been rejected. There was always a political background to it. (Gesina, lines 160-165)

Similarly, we find evidence of restricted access to education in other interviews. One interviewee comes from a family that was critical of the system and where reading and discussion were common practices. As a result, her access to education was heavily restricted. 'I actually wanted to study psychology … but they told me clearly here: 'It's not your grades, not your evaluations. It's your social background that doesn't allow it' (Frieda, lines 12-15).

Similarly, another interviewee remembers having a strong desire to enrol in German Studies but had reservations about her eligibility due to her parents' social background. The societal emphasis on the working class as the preferred source of talent created uncertainties and limitations for those outside this classification. She highlighted the pressure to be loyal to the system, even in selecting a profession. Propaganda machinery heavily influenced career choices, particularly for women. Technical professions such as electronics, cybernetics, and engineering were promoted, while others, like German Studies, were discouraged. This interviewee acknowledged succumbing to societal expectations and choosing a technical profession, only to later regret her decision.

> It has come back to haunt me. I didn't feel good about it. I should have thought for myself as an individual, but the times were such that independent thinking was not an option. I surrendered myself to the direction that was dictated. … We were all led like sheep. I was one of them. (Sylvia, lines 70-74)

Another participant discussed the mandatory political and ideological dimension that was present in all forms of education in the GDR. This ideology, as he described it, centred around communism and the belief that people are inherently good and can change the world to create a better future. However, he felt that this idealistic view of people was not realistic, and that this mandatory ideology was more of an obligation rather than a genuine belief. Eduard described this political ideology as being present in all academic subjects and was also fostered in department and union meetings. The direction and teachings of the ideology were predetermined:

> There were these rules we had to follow, and even the stuff we learned in our studies was all laid out for us. It was all about communism and all that jazz. If you think about it, they were these big, grand ideals we were supposed to embrace. 'Man is good and changes everything, and we strive for a blooming future.' That's what I heard, and I thought: 'Stay on the carpet.' Man is contradictory and cannot be educated to the ideal. It was a compulsory exercise. … It was included in all academic subjects. This continued in the department meetings, union meetings. The political orientation was maintained. The direction was already given. (Eduard, lines 89-96)

Eduard also reflected on the limited diversity of thought and freedom of expression at his institution. 'There was nothing else. There was no possibility of being different. There was no plurality of thinking. That was restricted. One had to walk only on this one path. Everything else brought one into danger' (Eduard, lines 65-68). There was only one approved way of thinking, and any deviation from that path was perceived as dangerous. Frieda remembered: 'With the reunification, I had a sense of being able to act as an adult, to truly behave as an adult. No longer bound by the state context, and yes, acting with a certain defiance, with resistance' (Frieda, lines 100-102). The sentiment of newfound adulthood, liberated from the constraints of the state, reflects a transition from a paternalistic structure to a more autonomous and self-directed existence and also learning. Eduard similarly reflected that although during the GDR era people enjoyed aspects such as employment, free education, and engaging lectures, upon post-reunification there was a profound realisation of the limitations imposed during the GDR, leading to a re-

evaluation of the experiences of unfreedom and a deeper understanding of the constraints that shaped their lives during that period.

Coexistence of conformity and resistance

The fact that state adult education had an obligatory political and ideological dimension was mentioned in many interviews. However, our participants reported that learners and lecturers had developed a certain critical distance from their imposed ideology, sometimes even bordering on cynicism.

> There was no longer any belief. It was a sarcastic, pragmatic way of doing things because you had to do it. … But it was also about doing it right. Representing the logarithms correctly, regardless of the truth. … Everyone knew what was going on, but you had to pretend and use the right terms. (Felix, lines 134-137)

Another interviewee gave a similar response:

> There was political-ideological training that ran throughout one's life and was mandated by the state. It was seen as irrevocable by many people. It was eaten by many people. You waited until it was over. Ways to circumvent it were looked at, but they were very minor. … I made the best of it. I wasn't swimming against the tide; that's how you dug your own grave. Every effort was made not to end up on the blacklist. (Eduard, lines 24-28)

In all interviews, the role of the church, the student community, or the Protestant Academies was emphasized as a counterpart or compensation to the system-compliant adult education organised and controlled by the state. It was seen as a form of 'substitute education', a way to compensate for the limitations and constraints of the official system: 'That was the alternative: great freedom on a small scale' (Felix, lines 150-152). In essence, these institutions provided a space where individuals could experience an educational environment that offered more opportunities for independent thinking and even dissent.

However, the Protestant Academies as a space for education and criticality was also described as stabilising the overall system; it was a valve that made it possible to endure the reality of the GDR. One participant described church education in both functions: as a call to maturity (*Mündigkeit*) and emancipation, but also as pacification, or *soundproofing*.

> So in the church area, adult education has done a lot for language skills, for maturity, for self-confidence, independence from ideological guidelines, and also for a home. Stay in the country and fight back every day ..., but that stabilised the system and did not lead to a critical change. (Felix, lines 175-178)

Some participants pointed out that there were also opportunities in the GDR to hear different perspectives and to be critical of the regime. When asked whether it was possible to educate oneself if one wanted to, one interviewee responded that you could educate yourself freely in the GDR if you wanted to, but added that such a free education was linked to certain prerequisites. You had to 'come from a middle-class family, with many books and musical instruments', to 'know certain people' (writers, musicians, libraries or booksellers), and have financial security (e.g., through a solid income of the spouse). 'Anyone who had no access to certain educational institutions or people who had a certain (educational) level had lost' (Sylvia, lines 90-95). But she also adds self-critically:

> If I had been processed properly, at 15-16, I don't know where I would have ended up. I can't put my hand in the fire for that. If I hadn't had a middle-class family home, if I had grown up in a family with party bosses, I was very enthusiastic, you could have inspired me. (Sylvia, lines 110-113)

The fear of consequences was also mentioned , which in retrospect aroused feelings of shame because of his adaptive behaviours, further emphasizing the ethical and emotional dilemmas individuals in the GDR faced.

> There was fear of reprisals. That's why you went along with everything. Adaptation was the order of the day. Personally, one was not proud of it, one was also ashamed of it, but in the interest of one's own continued existence and to avert difficulties from the family, one adapted and swam to some extent with the current. (Eduard, lines 40-44)

Two interviewees highlighted that within circles related to Lutheran churches there were spaces for critical discourse – spaces of encounter, small alternative public spaces. They spoke about 'Mit-Öffentlichkeit' (Frieda, line 64; Felix, line 160), a concept that was not a counter-public but rather a co-public; it radiated outward. These spaces existed within the framework of the church, through lectures or discussion groups that addressed spiritual and life-related questions.

> Our teacher recently told me that they avoided using the term 'adult education' since it was reserved for the state-controlled sphere. Education was not the domain of the church; it was not allowed to be. Instead, the focus was on pastoral care. (Frieda, lines 80-82)

By framing these educational spaces in terms of pastoral care rather than adult education, the church was able to create spaces that fostered intellectual exploration while avoiding direct confrontation with the regime's control over the education sector. This highlights a complex interplay between conformity and resistance ('zwischen Anpassung und Widerstand' as Friedenthal-Haase (2007) expressed it), as participants navigated the ideological landscape while maintaining a sense of agency within the existing societal structures.

> Self-education was at the heart of all education. It occurred continuously and was often unnamed. For example, we read books recommended by bookshop owners whom we knew. We would pass on the books and transcribe them with three carbon copies. A friend would copy them, and then we would distribute them as a form of self-education through book sharing. (Frieda, lines 25-28)

This quotation exemplifies the resourcefulness and resilience of individuals in their pursuit of intellectual growth. While formal education may have been tightly regulated and limited by ideological constraints, individuals actively sought out alternative sources of knowledge.

Discussion of the findings

In our critique of the GDR, we do not mean to imply that democracies in the West were thriving according to their principles and ideals. In many ways, they were not and still do not. Nevertheless, if we are to pursue democracy as a project and strive for its ideals, then adult education is a necessity. And, not just any system of adult education, as it *per se* does not necessarily support democracy. When used as a tool of control, the very essence of education becomes warped, and it morphs into indoctrination. The case of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) helps us to recognise the inherent contradictions within the

GDR's approach to education, contrasting the regime's vision of a 'totalitarian learning society' with the fundamental principles of adult education in the service of democracy.

As shown in our *first finding*, the demand for shaping society and guiding people manifested itself in the vision of a totalitarian learning society (Siebert, 1970). Participation in state-organised adult education events, anchored by the legal regulations on education, was often not voluntary. The right to education, which was proclaimed in the three constitutions of the GDR (in 1949, 1968, and 1974), pursued the goal of shaping socialist personalities through education, and of providing the working class with supposedly sufficient qualifications to meet the requirements of the economy through compulsory general and specialised education. The right to education was therefore not a right to opt in or out of one's desired educational offerings and did not offer open and free access to educational institutions. Rather, this right was manifested in compulsory education, which was explicitly described in the Labor Code of the GDR. Every working person had 'the honourable duty to constantly educate themselves in accordance with the higher requirements resulting from social development, in particular economic and technical progress' (Arbeitsgesetzbuch, 1977, Paragraph 1) or the duty, to 'participate in qualification measures that are part of his job' (Paragraph 2; translated by the authors). The working people were not only asked to take part in qualification courses, but they also had an obligation to society to attend the courses regularly and with the greatest possible success. This runs counter to the emancipatory tradition of adult education as mentioned in the beginning of the article, which requires that adult education recognise an adult person as autonomous and self-determined, not an object to be used in the furtherance of others' will or even of a supposed higher purpose.

Education, even the education of adults, can never be completely free from all forms of intended and goal-oriented influences. But adult education in the service of democracy can and should be an open-ended-process, not one predetermined by external forces while bypassing the will of an individual. We define the goal of education as supporting an active, autonomous ('mündig') person in the interaction with his/her material and social environments (Hoggan & Hoggan-Kloubert, 2021). The main goal of education (understood in the tradition of Humboldt, see Benner, 2003) is to foster an individual's unique identity and fortify their capabilities, and therefore not allowing a person to be the object of any extrinsic visions of an individual. It is thus an open, self-reflective, never-ending process involving self-development through encounters with pluralism. According to Horkheimer (1981), education is a pursuit of inner freedom, 'The desire for education (*Bildung*) contains this will to become powerful of oneself, to be not dependent on blind powers, of apparent ideas, of obsolete concepts, of dismissed views and illusions' (p. 160; translated by the authors). Furthermore, the central aspect of this *Bildung* tradition is the critical attitude towards the tendency of instrumentalism in educational policy and educational concepts. Hufer (2016) claims:

> To my mind, civic education is always critical, otherwise it would be neither civic nor education. It would be training, indoctrination or agitation with the aim of forcing the participants to conform, it would not be education, but their opposite. (p. 120; translated by the authors)

One important and hopeful insight can be gleaned from our *second finding*, which is that the educational efforts of the GDR often did not yield the desired outcomes. Benecke (2022) notes that the socialist education system could not produce the envisioned socialist personality (p. 17); the aspired consolidation of power did not achieve the efficiency demanded by the SED-party. Throughout the existence of the GDR, disparities between educational programmes, expectations of education, and their actual implementation

became apparent. The data presented in this article reveal that educators developed a certain critical distance, sometimes bordering on cynicism, towards the system (see also Tenorth, 2022, pp. 61-62); they describe their compliance (unwitting, often remembered with shame), but not a succumbing to the ideology. Summarising the impact of the work of adult educators in the GDR, Siebert (2001) characterises it as a lesson that we all can learn from history. 'Sometimes, it is comforting to know that adult education achieves less than the actors desire. There exists an intelligent resistance to adult learning' (p. 292; translated by the authors). Siebert's assessment highlights the existence of a discerning and critical mindset among adults, one that resisted complete assimilation into the ideological constructs imposed upon them.

A democracy functioning according to its ideals, where citizens are active co-shapers of their shared social and political worlds, requires high cognitive demands. In such a system, we would have to grapple with complex societal debates, and there can be a temptation to avoid this complexity. Adult education should be wary of pedagogical approaches that offer relief from struggle through simple solutions, pulling learners into the trap of a single worldview imposed from the outside. In educational contexts where dissenting voices risk marginalisation or cancellation, reflection and critical thinking are suppressed, leaving a person with a feeling of a fractured self, sometimes with a feeling of guilt and consciousness splitting, resulting from internal conflicts or external coercion (Milosz, 1953).

Conclusion

It would be too simplistic to say that adult education in the GDR was bad and contemporary Western education is good. In many respects, adult education in the GDR was extensive, innovative, and impressive; it demonstrated a comprehensive approach in terms of systematic planning and resource allocation. However, the GDR, because of its explicitness in trying to use education to promote a particular type of human development, did not support the (autonomous) individual as such, but rather addressed people only as servants of the system and in their usefulness for a particular sphere of a society (e.g., industry). And, this philosophy and practice undermined adult education's role in the service of democracy, by hindering the development of the civic capacities needed for a person to be a co-shaper of their worlds (and not only a silent spectator or obedient follower). Even though adult education can provide positive outcomes and be successful in various aspects, it can at the same time be used to undermine democracy and support anti-democratic aims.

As Fritze (2008) points out, even in democracies, political propaganda and attempts at mental manipulation are common. The key difference between an ideology-driven dictatorship and a democracy lies in the fact that in a pluralistic society, individuals are confronted with diverse ideas, opinions, and beliefs, and they must independently navigate and make their own choices. On the other hand, in a totalitarian regime, individuals are confronted with a single source of information, pervasive propaganda, and a monopoly on education. In an ideology-driven dictatorship, the conditions that facilitate critical and autonomous thinking and belief formation are deliberately and systematically undermined.

In the totalitarian state which the GDR was, the availability and pretended variety of learning opportunities served as camouflage, a simulation of democratic structures for external demonstration and internal propaganda. The *forming* of the desired socialistic personality was also used to ensure the preservation of the system while creating loyal followers and system adherents (Brock, 2006). The pressures of conformity and influence

of propaganda machinery underscore the profound impact of totalitarianism on the educational landscape. Adult education was a mechanism to suppress subversive internal forces from the outset or to change their minds. In this sense, it stabilised a non-democratic system.

Of course, every institution of adult education (in e.g., industry, higher education, agriculture, government, healthcare, libraries, or unions), will have a particular orientation to the learning needs within its sphere, but they also all have a larger responsibility to facilitate individual (and therefore also group and societal) development. And, this development requires active participation and decision-making. The development of democratic citizens who are capable of co-participation in and co-shaping of their shared social and political worlds cannot be accomplished through indoctrination, through dictating *truth* and unilaterally determining how people should think and act.

This case study explores a crucial systemic issue that has both historical and contemporary relevance to the field of adult education, namely the distinction between education and indoctrination, between the facilitation of learning and the exertion of control, and between the empowerment of individuals and the oppression of society. It is important for individuals and institutions involved in educational scholarship and practice to remain vigilant, critically evaluating their own practices and principles to ensure they are not undermining democracy and its necessary concomitants of freedom, solidarity, and access to knowledge. In most situations, we are not confronted with a federal government that is seeking to indoctrinate a whole society through adult education; the danger of totalitarianism does not necessarily have to manifest that way. We do, however, face more subtle tendencies and pressures that serve the same anti-democratic purposes. As this article describes, we need to be aware of and resist pressures to conformity, where ideologies (whether left- or right-leaning) are held as sacrosanct, and where dissenters are 'cancelled'. We need to ensure in our practices that human dignity is upheld, particularly regarding every individual person being respected and valuable *qua human beings*, and not valued solely for their usefulness to the organization or a cause (Hoggan & Hoggan-Kloubert, 2023). We need to ensure that complex human and societal problems are not treated simplistically, resulting in dichotomous categorisations of right/wrong, good/bad, us/them. Such dualisms lead to a dangerous polarisation, which precludes democracy from functioning (Hoggan & Hoggan-Kloubert, 2023, pp. 366-377). If we view democracy as the active co-shaping of the shared social and political world, then our practices as adult educators need to foster the development of those capacities.

Notes

1 Siebert's work, an attempt at a comprehensive study of adult education in the GDR, is an important source for understanding the historical context. We draw heavily on Siebert's extensive research because of its robust grounding in primary sources, supported by his personal visits to the GDR. In doing so, we acknowledge that Siebert's research took place during the Cold War era, a period marked by heightened ideological tensions. As such, his perspective was undoubtedly influenced by the polarized political climate of the time.

Declaration of conflicting interests

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

References

Arbeitsgesetzbuch. (1977). *Arbeitsgesetzbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* [Labour Code of the German Democratic Republic]. GBl. DDR 1977 I, Nr. 8, 185-228.

Arbeitsplan der VHSn der SBZ Deutschland für 1948-1950 [Work Plan of the Adult Education Centres in the Soviet Occupation Zone of Germany for 1948-1950]. *Volkshochschule*, (12), 388-397.

Benecke, J. (2022). Einführung in den Band [Introduction to the Volume]. In J. Benecke (Ed.), *Erziehungs- und Bildungsverhältnisse in der DDR* (pp. 9-24). Klinkhardt.

Benner, D. (2003). *Wilhelm von Humboldts Bildungstheorie* [Wilhelm von Humboldt's Theory of Education]. Juventa.

Biesta, G. J. J. (2011). *Learning democracy in school and society: Education, lifelong learning, and the politics of citizenship*. Springer Science & Business Media.

Boggs, D. L. (1991). Civic education: An adult education imperative. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *42*(1), 46-55.

Borinski, F., & Friedenthal-Haase, M. (2014). *The German Volkshochschule: An experiment in democratic adult education under the Weimar Republic*. Verlag Julius Klinkhardt.

Bramer, H. (1991). Berufliche Weiterbildung in der DDR vor der Wende [Continuing Professional Education in the GDR before Reunification]. *Mitteilungen aus der Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung, 24*(2), 423-431.

Brock, A. (2006). *The making of the socialist personality: Education and socialisation in the German Democratic Republic 1958-1978*. University of London.

Böhm, W., & Seichter, S. (2018). *Wörterbuch der Pädagogik* [Dictionary of Pedagogy] (17th ed.). Schöningh.

Deutscher Ausschuß für das Erziehungs- und Bildungswesen (1960). *Zur Situation und Aufgabe der deutschen Erwachsenenbildung* [On the Situation and Role of German Adult Education]. Klett.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and Education*. Macmillan.

Direktorenkonferenz in Thüringen [Directors Conference in Thuringia] (1950). *Volkshochschule, 4*(4).

Emmerling, E. (1958). *50 Jahre Volkshochschule in Deutschland: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Erwachsenenbildung* [50 Years of Volkshochschule in Germany: A Contribution to the History of Adult Education]. Volk und Wissen.

Flick, U. (2019). *Qualitative Sozialforschung: Eine Einführung* [Qualitative Social Research: An Introduction]. Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag.

Friedenthal-Haase, M. (2000). Einleitung der Herausgeberin [Editor's Introduction]. In M. Friedenthal-Haase (Ed.), *Erwachsenenbildung, Erwachsenenqualifizierung, Erwachsenenlenkung in Thüringen 1945-1989. Ein vorläufiger Quellenbericht* (pp. vii-xvi). Institut für Erziehungswissenschaft.

Friedenthal-Haase, M. (Ed.). (2007). *Evangelische Akademien in der DDR: Quellen und Untersuchungen zu Bildungsstätten zwischen Widerstand und Anpassung* [Protestant Academies in the GDR: Sources and Studies on Educational Institutions Between Resistance and Conformity]. Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.

Friedrich, C. J., & Brzezinski, Z. K. (1965). *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (2nd ed.). Harvard University Press.

Fritze, L. (2008). Die Weltanschauungsdiktatur [The Worldview Dictatorship]. *Totalitarismus und Demokratie, 5*(2), 205-227.

Gesetz über das einheitliche sozialistische Bildungssystem [Law on the Unified Socialist Education System] (1965). GBl. DDR 1965 I, Nr. 6, 83-106.

Gieseke, W., & Opelt, K. (2003). *Erwachsenenbildung in politischen Umbrüchen: Programmforschung Volkshochschule Dresden 1945-1997* [Adult Education During Political Turmoil: Program Research at the Volkshochschule Dresden 1945-1997]. Springer-Verlag.

Gutsche, H. (1958). *Die Erwachsenenbildung in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone. Textteil* [Adult Education in the Soviet Occupation Zone. Text Section] (Vol. 1). Bundesministerium für gesamtdeutsche Fragen.

Hoggan, C., & Hoggan-Kloubert, T. (2021). From alternative facts to tentative truths: Towards a post-postmodern dialogic epistemology. *Adult Education Critical Issues*, *1*(1), 9-22. https://doi.org/10.12681/aeci.28795

Hoggan, C., & Hoggan-Kloubert, T. (2023). The Ethics of Radical and Transformative Education. *Adult Education Quarterly, 73*(4), 363-381. https://doi.org/10.1177/07417136231187840

Hoggan-Kloubert, T. (2024). Learning from the Past: Continuity as a Dimension of Transformation. *Adult Education Quarterly, 74*(2), 95-111. https://doi.org/10.1177/07417136231192008

Hoggan-Kloubert, T., & Hoggan, C. (2023). Post-truth as an Epistemic Crisis: The Need for Rationality, Autonomy, and Plurality. *Adult Education Quarterly, 73*(1), 3-20. https://doi.org/10.1177/07417136221080424

Hoggan-Kloubert, T., & Luthardt, N. (2022). Erwachsenenbildung in der DDR [Adult Education in the GDR]. In J. Benecke (Ed.), *Erziehung und Bildung in der DDR* (pp. 291-311). Klinkhardt.

Horkheimer, M. (1981). *Gesellschaft im Übergang: Aufsätze, Reden und Vorträge 1942*-1970 [Society in Transition: Articles, Speeches, and Lectures 1942-1970]. Fischer Verlag.

Horkheimer, M., & Adorno, T. W. (1947). *Dialektik der Aufklärung* [Dialectic of Enlightenment]. Suhrkamp.

Hufer, K-P. (2016). *Politische Erwachsenenbildung: Plädoyer für eine vernachlässigte Disziplin* [Political Adult Education: A Plea for a Neglected Discipline]. BPB.

Jesse, E. (2005). Das Dritte Reich und die DDR: Zwei 'deutsche' Diktaturen? [The Third Reich and the GDR: Two 'German' Dictatorships?]. *Totalitarismus und Demokratie, 2*(1), 39-59. https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-309507

Klemm, U., Lemke, T., & Mede-Schelenz, A. (2019). *100 Jahre Volkshochschule in Sachsen. Begleitbroschüre zur Ausstellung* [100 Years of Adult Education Centers in Saxony: Companion Brochure to the Exhibition] (Edition VHS AKTUELL – Beiträge zur Weiterbildung, Heft 11). Sächsischer Volkshochschulverband.

Knoll, J. H., & Siebert, H. (1968). *Erwachsenenbildung. Erwachsenenqualifizierung. Darstellung und Dokumente der Erwachsenenbildung in der DDR* [Adult Education. Adult Qualification. An Overview and Documents of Adult Education in the GDR]. Quelle & Meyer.

Knoll, J. H. (1990). Erwachsenenbildung [Adult Education]. In O. Anweiler, W. Mitter, H. Peisert, H.-P. Schäfer, & W. Stratenweth (Eds.), *Vergleich von Bildung und Erziehung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (pp. 490-509). Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik.

Knoll, J. H. (1999). Konvergente und divergente Erscheinungen in der Erwachsenenbildung in Mitteleuropa: Eine vergleichende Darstellung wesentlicher Strukturelemente [Convergent and Divergent Phenomena in Adult Education in Central Europe: A Comparative Presentation of Key Structural Elements]. *Bildung und Erziehung*, *52*(2), 197-216. https://doi.org/10.7788/bue.1999.52.2.197

Kuckartz, U., & Rädiker, S. (2022). *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Methoden, Praxis, Computerunterstützung* [Qualitative Content Analysis: Methods, Practice, Computer Support]. Beltz Juventa.

Lehmann. A. (1950). Das geht auch uns an. Gedanken zum 4. Pädagogischen Kongreß in Leipzig [This Is Also Our Concern: Thoughts on the 4th Educational Congress in Leipzig]. *Volkshochschule, 1*(4), 14-18.

Lemke, C. (1980). *Persönlichkeit und Gesellschaft: Zur Theorie der Persönlichkeit in der DDR* [Personality and Society: On the Theory of Personality in the GDR]. Westdeutscher Verlag.

Meilhammer, E. (2019). *Volkshochschule: Vergangenheit - Gegenwart - Zukunft* [Volkshochschule: Past - Present - Future] (Volkshochschule aktuell, Heft 4). Thüringer Volkshochschulverband.

Miethe, I. (2007). *Bildung und soziale Ungleichheit in der DDR: Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer gegenprivilegierenden Bildungspolitik* [Education and Social Inequality in the GDR: Opportunities and Limits of a Counter-privileging Education Policy]. Barbara Budrich Verlag.

Milosz, C. (1953). *The Captive Mind*. Knopf.

Negt, O. (2010). *Der politische Mensch: Demokratie als Lebensform* [The Political Person: Democracy as a Way of Life]. Steidl.

Olbertz, J. H. (1994). Zwischen Systemgebundenheit und Variabilität: Erwachsenenbildung in der DDR [Between System Dependency and Variability: Adult Education in the GDR]. In H-H. Krüger, & W. Marotzki (Eds.), *Pädagogik und Erziehungsalltag in der DDR. Zwischen Systemvorgaben und Pluralität* (pp. 293-319). Leske+Budrich.

Opelt, K. (2004). *Volkshochschule in der SBZ/DDR: Historische Quellenanalyse zur Strukturbildung* [Volkshochschule in the Soviet Occupation Zone/GDR: A Historical Source Analysis of Structure Formation]. Leske+Budrich.

Opelt, K. (2005). *DDR-Erwachsenenbildung* [Adult Education in the GDR]. Waxmann.

Ramm, T. (1990). Die Bildungsverfassungen [The Education Constitutions]. In O. Anweilter, W. Mitter, H. Peisert, H. P. Schäfer, & W. Stratenwerth (Eds.), *Vergleich von Bildung und Erziehung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Materialien zur Lage der Nation)* (pp. 34-56). Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik.

Rothe, A. (2003). Entwicklungslinien kirchlicher Bildungsarbeit in der DDR [Developmental Paths of Church Education in the GDR]. *Bildung und Erziehung, 56*(3), 263-286. https://doi.org/10.7788/bue.2003.56.3.263

Schneider, G., Achtel, K., Bauer, M., Pogodda, G., & Wolter, W. (1988). *Erwachsenenbildung* [Adult Education]. Volk und Wissen.

Schröer, W. (1968). Politisch-ideologische Erziehung in der Erwachsenenqualifizierung erhöhen [Increase political-ideological education in adult qualification]. *Berufsbildung, 22*(10), 484-488.

Siebert, H. (1970). *Erwachsenenbildung in der Erziehungsgesellschaft der DDR: Zur Geschichte und Theorie der sozialistischen Erwachsenenbildung* [Adult education in the educational society of the GDR: On the history and theory of socialist adult education]. Bertelsmann.

Siebert, H. (2001). Erwachsenenbildung in der DDR [Adult Education in the GDR]. In J. Olbrich (Ed., assisted by H. Siebert), *Geschichte der Erwachsenenbildung in Deutschland* (pp. 271-303). Leske+Budrich.

Staatliche Zentralverwaltung für Statistik. (Ed.) (1989). *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* [Statistical Yearbook of the German Democratic Republic] (Vol. 34). Staatsverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik.

Tenorth, H-E. (2022). Pädagogik und Erziehungswissenschaft in der DDR: Funktion, Struktur und Praxis ihrer Wissensformen [Pedagogy and Educational Science in the GDR: Function, Structure, and Practice of Their Epistemic Forms]. In J. Benecke (Ed.), *Erziehungs- und Bildungsverhältnisse in der DDR* (pp. 42-68). Klinkhardt.

Tietgens, H. (1993). Erwachsenenbildung der DDR in der Perspektive des erzählenden Rückblicks [The Adult Education of the GDR in the Perspective of a Narrative Retrospective]. In K. Meisel (Ed.), *Erwachsenenbildung in den neuen Ländern: Recherchen, Momentaufnahmen, Explorationen* (pp. 11-26). Pädagogische Arbeitsstelle des DVV.

Trier, M. (2010). Geschichte der Erwachsenenbildung – von 1945 bis 1989 in der SBZ/DDR [History of Adult Education – 1945 to 1989 in the SBZ/GDR]. In R. Arnold, S. Nolda, & E. Nuissl (Eds.), *Wörterbuch Erwachsenenbildung* (2nd ed., pp. 130-131). Julius Klinkhardt.

Zeuner, C. (2010). Aufgaben und Perspektiven der Erwachsenenbildung in einer demokratischen Gesellschaft [Tasks and Perspectives of Adult Education in a Democratic Society]. In S. Aufenanger, F. Hamburger, L. Ludwig, & R. Tippelt (Eds.), *Bildung in der Demokratie* (pp. 169-187). Budrich.

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2025, pp. 59-74

Directive adult education by political actors: Orientation expectations towards adults in Germany

Arnd-Michael Nohl
Helmut Schmidt University, Germany (nohl@hsu-hh.de)

Abstract

This paper presents for discussion two empirically grounded theses. First, political actors educate adults, and second, in doing so, they use directive forms of education; that is, they expect adult members of society to adopt certain orientations. Following a theoretical discussion on the directive education concept and its relevance to public pedagogy, the methodology (discourse analysis and documentary method) is explained. Then, three approaches to directive adult education demonstrated by political actors are empirically analysed: (1) directive political education is employed by political party leaders when, in the face of a potential U-turn of their party, they try to change the core political convictions of party supporters; (2) newcomers to society are directively educated to adopt democratic role orientations; and (3) in social fields in which practices are standardised by laws but cannot sufficiently be controlled, directive education for the common good can be observed. These types of directive education used by political actors are discussed vis-à-vis the concepts of paternalism and pedagogization.

Keywords: directive adult education, democracy, discourse analysis, paternalism, pedagogization

Introduction

The notion that adult education centres around facilitating self-directed learning processes of (supposedly) autonomous adults has faced criticism from various strands of adult education research. Drawing from a Foucauldian perspective, several analyses revealed the power-driven subconscious processes of subject formation that occur within adult education, often unnoticed by both the participants and the educators themselves (see, for instance, Fejes & Nicoll, 2008). Conversely, other scholars argue that, if necessary, it is the responsibility of adult educators to guide adults beyond their own intentions,

ISSN 2000-7426

© 2025 The author
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/
http://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.4794
www.rela.ep.liu.se

particularly when these adults are still acquiring the capacity to 'think like an adult' (Mezirow, 2000). With reference to critical adult education, which urges adults to question their previous (problematic) views, Brookfield (2009, p. 218) alludes to 'the inevitably directive nature of education.' The paternalism inherent in such processes of adult education is considered legitimate as long as educators act in the best interests of their participants (Fuhr, 2013, p. 31).

This article aligns with the criticism that adult education should not be reduced to facilitating self-directed learning processes of (supposedly) autonomous adults. However, the focus of the article differs in two key respects from this criticism. Firstly, it examines processes wherein adults, over a sustained period and reinforced by (threatened) sanctions, are communicatively and overtly expected to adopt specific orientations put forward by others, devoid of taking any individual interests in learning into account. Secondly, such kind of a directive adult education is not carried out by adult educators but, as particular focus of this article, by political actors who do not seem to grant adult members of the society the autonomy to decide how they wish to orient themselves but, rather, seek to prescribe these orientations.

A notable instance of such a directive adult education by political leaders can be found in the speech delivered by Germany's then chancellor, Angela Merkel, in the Bundestag (the federal parliament of Germany) in the autumn of 2020, which coincided with the onset of the second wave of the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic. In her address, Merkel spoke not only to parliamentarians but to all citizens:

> I appeal to all of you: adhere to the rules that must also apply in the coming period. Let us, as citizens of this society, collectively take greater care of each other. Let's remind one another that maintaining our distance, wearing nose-mouth protection, regularly washing our hands, ventilating rooms, and using the Corona warning app, safeguards not only the elderly and not only the so-called at-risk individuals but our open, free society as a whole. (as cited in Deutscher Bundestag, 2020, p. 22527; translated by the author).

In the Bundestag, laws and regulations typically become the centre of contentious debate among Parliament members. The chancellor's appeal to the entire spectrum of society to comply with these regulations was extraordinary but deemed necessary from her standpoint. 'After all', as Merkel emphasised, 'all rules, regulations, and measures are of little or no use if they are not accepted and adhered to by the people'.

With these final words, she articulated a problem that is encountered not only during existential crises, such as a pandemic, but constantly: all states, particularly democratic ones, rely on the responsive conduct of their population, yet, lack the capacity to entirely enforce such conduct through legislation. When political actors in democracies find that instilling a certain willingness to act has become necessary, they may resort to communicatively expecting adult citizens to adopt certain orientations. While political actors usually seek, through persuasive communication or even demagogy, to generate support for specific political decisions (for example, for the government's pandemic legislation), in processes of directive adult education, they prefer to strongly suggest a way of acting that people should incorporate into their routine lives as habit (such as wearing a mask). Although these political actors may not perceive their actions to constitute the educating of adults, they rely on an eminently pedagogical practice to communicate their messages.

The empirical findings presented in this article illustrate the way the state and other political actors communicatively expect adult members of the society to adopt certain orientations and, thus, the way those actors seek to educate adults in a directive way. Through these findings, two neglected aspects of adult education are put into the

limelight: 1) political leaders may participate in educating adult members of society, and 2) they may do so by expectantly guiding adults towards specific orientations, but without taking necessarily their individual needs into account. The first aspect has been only briefly touched upon in discussions on 'public pedagogies'; the latter is often counterintuitive, as only children and adolescents are generally assumed to be educated in a directive manner. By contrast, adults are commonly perceived to acquire orientations on their own, given their presumedly developed level of self-responsibility and maturity.

To elaborate on these two claims, I first explain my understanding of directive education. I then discuss the concept of public pedagogy, which aids in analysing directive educational processes for adults that unfold tacitly and are not part of a formal education system. After introducing the methodological background of my research, I delve into three forms of directive education employed by political actors that I empirically analysed.[1] Firstly, directive *political* education becomes relevant when, in the course of a potential U-turn by a political party, its leaders attempt to change the core political convictions of party supporters. The second form of directive education I investigate is directive *democracy* education, which does not revolve around specific political world views but, instead, concerns attitudes towards democracy itself. For example, individuals perceived as newcomers to society, such as adolescents and adult immigrants, undergo educational means of directive democracy education. The third form of directive education employed by political actors that I examine is directive education for the *common good*. Certain areas in society are regulated by laws that are, however, unable to sufficiently control people's behaviour. In cases related to, for example, waste separation, unemployment or the fight against pandemics, forms of directive education for the common good can be observed.

Although the empirical examples I use to substantiate my theses are drawn from the German context, they are in my view relevant to adult education in other democracies as well. This applies especially to the two theoretical aspects through which I discuss my empirical findings: Directive adult education implies an asymmetrical relationship between political actors and the populace, which can be problematised as *paternalism*. Simultaneously, whether the (usually tacit) employment of pedagogical means by political actors results in an illegitimate *pedagogization* of political problems, should be considered as well.

The expectant and encouraging nature of directive education

On a conceptual level and within the framework of an ideal-typical procedure, the concept of directive education gets clearer by juxtaposing it with non-directive education: in German, by comparing *Erziehung* to *Bildung*. Non-directive education necessarily includes 'autonomous opinion formation' (Kloubert, 2018, p. 140) for which, for example, 'methods for evaluating the truth and falsehood, or relative probability, of various claims about the world' are taught, and adult learners are exposed to divergent life projects and world views together with their respective critique (Brighouse, 1998, p. 736). An important feature of non-directive education is the space given to controversies: that is, the space allowed for discourse on divergent world views pertaining to the topic under discussion. This 'multiperspectivity' (Sander, 2004, p. 9) can sometimes even help people to question their own 'meaning perspectives' and – in the sense of a transformation process – open new perspectives (Mezirow, 1978). Even without leading to transformation, non-directive education has similarities with Bildung (Kloubert, 2018).
Implied here is the role of the adult educator as a 'non-directive facilitator working to realise learners' agendas' (Brookfield, 2004, p. 380). This can be contrasted with the

'directive role of adult educators' (p. 383), which can turn adult citizens into opponents of the prevailing political order but can also be used to organise adult education as a process through which 'newcomers' become part [of] and are inserted into the existing social and political order' (Biesta, 2011, p. 149). The latter option verges on 'overwhelming students [including adult learners; A.-M.N.] with pre-determined positions and beliefs' (Kloubert, 2018, p. 142) and may be called *Erziehung*.

I define directive education as the process by which a first actor communicates, in a sustained manner and underpinned by (threatened) sanctions, the expectation to (a) second actor(s) that the latter will adopt certain orientations provided by the first actor. Here, the notion of orientation (Bohnsack, 2014) does not refer to a conscious opinion but to a way of seeing the world (in the sense of Weltanschauung [world view]; Mannheim, 1952) and to a modus operandi in the world that has become habitual.

Such directive education begins when adults obviously fail to inherently acquire an orientation that is provided to them and expected of them to adopt. Initially, they might experience this newly expected orientation as significantly diverging from their current interests and sensitivities and this might cause their restraint. At the same time, directive education implies that the educator is convinced that the recipients of the education are, in principle, capable of adopting the orientation expected of them. In this sense, educating others means strongly encouraging them to adopt a new orientation. (This entanglement of sustained expectation and encouragement is also evident in Merkel's speech quoted previously.) The communicated expectation that the recipient of the education shall adopt a specific orientation becomes sustainable when the outcomes of previous attempts to educate the person are verified through communication; in other words, when someone pays attention to whether the expected orientation has been appropriated by the recipient. This expectation is, moreover, underpinned by the threat of negative sanctions, or, the promise of positive sanctions (see Nohl, 2022b). Such sanctions refer to any form of reaction to, or consequences from, the actions of the person to be educated that benefits (reward) or harms (punishment) the latter, either materially or emotionally.

The debate surrounding the question whether the conceptual distinction between non-directive and directive education, albeit ideal-typical, is mirrored in the empirical practices of adult education facilities, has recently sparked contentious discussions (see, as an overview, Holzer, 2024). Yet, the central emphasis of this article is not pointed to the issue of directive education within adult education institutions, albeit not entirely excluding it. Instead, the focus is directed towards directive adult education as implicitly enacted within public media and by political actors. Considering this, directive adult education can be understood as 'mass education' (Prange & Strobel-Eisele, 2015, p. 203; translated by the author), representing an issue of public pedagogy.

Directive education in the context of public pedagogy

The concept of 'public pedagogy' is broadly defined here as referring to all educational actions taking place outside educational institutions that, tacitly or explicitly, try to shape the attitudes and orientations of citizens in some way. Henry Giroux (2004, pp. 74-75), for instance, argued that, in the age of neoliberalism, 'new sites of public pedagogy' … 'operate within a wide variety of social institutions and formats including sports and entertainment media, cable television networks, [and] churches and [within] channels of elite and popular culture, such as advertising'. Giroux explained that these sites aimed to 'produce competitive, self-interested individuals vying for their own material and ideological gain'. In contrast to these rather amorphous sites of public pedagogy, Giroux also noted that specific political actors exist – like the US-American Bush administration

after 9/11 – that succeeded in convincing citizens of their political agenda using educational means such as the transfer of (biased or even false) knowledge (Giroux, 2004, p. 76). Although the notion of 'public pedagogy' is also associated with other definitions (for an overview, see Sandlin et al., 2011), Giroux's work, as well as my analyses, focus on what Sandlin et al. (2011) called 'public policy as pedagogy' – in other words, inquiries into the way 'broadly communicated governmental, legal, and medical discourse and policymaking act as pedagogical outlets for the construction of specific public and private identities' (p. 352).

My analyses concern what Savage (2014, p. 81) called 'political publics'. My focus lies in the explicit orientation expectations that I discuss in this article as directive adult education. In this sense, the three forms of educating political publics in a directive way investigated in this paper are pedagogical activities intended to 'instruct the citizenry', which 'involves telling them what to think, how to act, and, perhaps most importantly, what to be' (Biesta, 2014, p. 21). They appear 'whenever the state instructs its citizens to be something – for example, law-abiding, tolerant, respectful, or active – which the state either does directly or through its educational agents' (p. 21). Such 'educative state action' (Lüdemann, 2004, p. 99; translated by the author) responds to the fact 'that the state and the law are dependent in many ways on accommodating citizens' convictions and ways of life' (Huster, 2014, p. 193; translated by the author). As I discuss subsequently, political actors other than the state – particularly party leaders – may also engage in such directive adult education. Using a very broad definition, I refer to political actors as individuals and organisations involved in bringing about and implementing collectively binding decisions. Within this broad definition, the political actors that are the subject of this article are characterised by their common integration into the state apparatus.

Within the context of public pedagogies, a fine line must be drawn between indoctrination and the educative expectation to adopt certain orientations. Whereas the former tries to eliminate the decision-making ability of the targeted group (Copp, 2016, pp. 150-155), expecting adults to adopt political orientations and values in the frame of directive education still considers and allows for possible disagreement from the adults receiving the education. More precisely, directive education produces (sustainable) effects only if the adults addressed take over the expected orientations within a certain space of autonomy.

The possibility of refusing the expected orientations delimits directive adult education not only from indoctrination but also from propaganda. Although propaganda shares the threat of sanctions with directive education, it 'thwarts our autonomy and agency' (Kloubert, 2018, p. 143). In contrast, directive adult education is always situated in the 'latent conflict' between the individual's autonomous decision-making process and the norms of collective entities (Grube, 2015, p. 180).

Discourse analysis and documentary method

As a pedagogical process that involves both the educating and educated persons, directive education should be empirically analysed by covering both types of actors and, possibly, interactions between them. However, my analyses are limited to the way political actors, within the framework of mass communication, direct the expectation that the population or specific social groups adopt certain orientations to that target audience. To empirically reconstruct this mass communication, I used a version of discourse analysis that was developed in line with the structure of the documentary method (Bohnsack, 2014). While other approaches to discourse analysis reconstruct dominant or society-wide discourses from the outset, documentary discourse interpretation (Nohl, 2016) not only considers the

diversity of discourses but also examines the way multiple social groups struggle 'to influence … the 'public interpretation of reality'' (Mannheim, 2000, p. 196). This is less about the 'contents of thought' – that is, the thematic content of the discourses – and more about the 'way of thinking' (Mannheim, 1999, p. 67) – that is, the modus operandi for raising a discussion point like the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach makes evident whether political actors are merely seeking approval for a collectively binding decision or expecting their audience to adopt certain orientations, or ways of action to be habituated.

To consider the difference between the content and the underlying mode of thinking, contributions to the respective discourse were first analysed by a *formulating interpretation* that summarised the content in the researcher's own words and then through a *reflective interpretation*. The latter focused on the 'perspective' that 'signifies the manner in which one views an object, what one perceives in it, and how one construes it in his [or her] thinking' (Mannheim, 1954, p. 244). The reconstruction of the discourse contributions was intended to elaborate on the way political actors expect their addressees to adopt specific orientations. The focus was not only on the way a topic (such as SARS-CoV-2) was discussed but, above all, on the way, i.e. the means and actions by which, the educational process was pushed forward.[2]

This inquiry was exploratory. Its purpose was not to provide a comprehensive overview of all manifestations of directive adult education by political actors or to determine the significance of directive adult education in the context of the political. Instead, based on the theoretical concept of directive education, the objective was to explore areas and contexts in which political actors educate citizens. The three areas in which political actors pursue directive adult education emerged gradually. In these areas, material was collected through a purposeful sampling: I only interpreted empirical data that served to analyse directive education. This empirical material included speeches by politicians, websites, brochures, open letters and textbooks for adults. For this article, I selected succinct examples to represent each of these areas, which I illustrate with brief insights into the empirical material (this empirical data is translated into English by myself). Of course, the entire discourse analysis is based on a more comprehensive empirical basis (see Nohl, 2022a).

Even if the three areas I discuss next do not encompass all forms of directive adult education employed by political actors, they are significant for the discussion on adult education because political education, democracy education and education for the common good each take place at the boundary between the political field and the field of education (including its informal components). This raises two important normative questions that are discussed following the empirical findings: (1) Is the paternalisation associated with adult directive education justified? (2) Are political problems possibly being inappropriately pedagogized in these three areas?

Directive political education during political party U-turns

Since the reunification of Germany, several political parties have gone through U-turns on questions that mattered greatly to their identity and that of their members and supporters. The *Party of Democratic Socialism* (which had evolved out of the ruling party of the German Democratic Republic and later merged with a Western counterpart into *The Left*) made peace with representative democracy and, to a certain degree, with the social market economy. Under the leadership of chancellor and party chairperson Gerhard Schröder, the *Social Democrat Party* massively reduced welfare programs in 2003. Faced with the situation of Syrian refugees who had become stuck in the Balkans, in 2015

chancellor Angela Merkel led the conservative *Christian Democratic Union* to rapidly change its policy from rejecting refugees to welcoming them. While the parameters of this article do not allow for elaboration on these U-turns and the ways party leaders expected new political orientations to be adopted by their members and followers (see Nohl, 2022a), the case of the Green party is discussed in depth.

The Greens,[3] founded by, among others, members of the peace movement, were prompted to question their pacifist stance when the Serbian army conquered the UN-protected zone in Srebrenica in the summer of 1995 and subsequently slaughtered thousands of Muslims. A directive political education process was initiated when the Green's informal leader (and later Foreign Secretary of Germany) Joschka Fischer (1995, para. 32), in the face of the atrocities that took place in Srebrenica, asked in an open letter: 'What is our response when we suddenly have to deal again with powers and political forces, indeed with people, who don't give a damn about international rules, human rights or even non-violence?'. With this open letter, published in the alternative newspaper *Tageszeitung*, Fischer initiated a 'politics of identity and orientation change' (Schwab-Trapp, 2002, p. 178; translated by the author) as the issue was not focused on a specific collectively binding decision but on fundamental orientations in the sense of a political Weltanschauung, or world view. According to Fischer, his party should go beyond merely questioning its previous pacifist stance. The only conclusion to be drawn from the massacre was that the UN 'must intervene militarily and protect people from mass murder and death marches'. By describing this as a 'bitter realisation', which was also new to him, Fischer not only styled himself as a reflective learner but also built a bridge for those party members who found this change of orientation difficult.

However, Fischer also knew how to garnish his expectation of orientation by announcing positive sanctions. He underpinned that facing up to the facts of war was a prerequisite for assuming responsibility for the federal government. Therefore, he promised the reward of increased power if the party members whom he tried to politically educate followed him. As this illustrates, educationally relevant sanctions do not have to be caused by educating actors themselves; they can also arise from the consequences resulting from the educated person's willingness or unwillingness to adopt the expected orientation.

Fischer was soon able to celebrate his first success. At the end of 1995, many members of the Green parliamentary group in the Bundestag voted to deploy German armed forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Schwab-Trapp, 2002, p. 147). However, Fischer was only able to ultimately succeed in employing directive education when the Red-Green federal government, which came into power in 1998, deployed fighter planes against Yugoslavia in 1999 to prevent it from attacking Kosovo. Opposition to this quickly formed within and outside the Green Party. Proponents and opponents met at a party conference on 13 May 1999. Before his speech, Fischer, who had been appointed as foreign secretary of the new government, was hit by a red paint bag thrown by an opponent of the war. Nevertheless, he stepped up to the podium and – protected by several police officers – gave an impressive speech. Fischer argued that it was not acceptable for the Green parliamentary group and government to pursue a realistic policy while the Green basis cultivated its 'peace policy conscience'.[4] He noted that they were no longer a 'protest party' and had to take 'responsibility':

> And that is not only the responsibility of the government, that is not only the responsibility of the Party Leadership and the Parliamentary Group, but it is the responsibility of the whole party, of all of us, to have the strength now, in this contradiction in which we find ourselves, namely that on the one hand we must stop Milosevic with military means, with a war, and at the same time to use all possibilities to achieve a peaceful solution for the return of the

> refugees and to achieve a permanent silencing of the weapons. (cf. Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 2010)

With these and other words, Fischer clarified that the Greens could only remain in government if the 'whole party' bore 'responsibility' for the war. Otherwise, the Green party would lose power, Fischer noted, threatening a negative sanction. As he also put his own reputation on the line by speaking at the May 1999 party conference and, thus, achieved 'legitimization through personalization' (Sarcinelli, 2010, p. 274; translated by the author), he gave decisive emphasis to the expected orientation to turn away from pacifism. The motion of the anti-war activists received significantly fewer votes at the party conference than Joschka Fischer's policy (Schwab-Trapp, 2002, p. 350). With this, the party consolidated the U-turn in its foreign policy, which was not to be reversed in the following years but, instead, was expanded after September 11, 2001, with the deployment of the German army in Afghanistan, decided under the second Red-Green government (2002-2005). The sustainability of this educational process shows that Fischer not only changed the minds of the delegates at the party conference but also permanently changed the political orientations of the once-pacifist Greens and their supporters.

Similar educational attempts to bring supporters along during a turnaround of their parties took place among The Left, the Social Democratic Party and the *Christian Democratic Union*. Directive political education, as it unfolded in these political party U-turns, targeted adult citizens' political Weltanschauung (Mannheim, 1952). The respective educational expectation refers to the way society is seen, what is perceived as political and what is assessed as suitable for and in need of a collectively binding decision. As demonstrated by the example of Joschka Fischer, party leaders threw all their prestige and entire symbolic capital into the balance to lead this political education of their followers to success.

Directive democracy education

In directive *political* education, orientations are expected to be adopted by adults that are highly relevant for their political Weltanschauung, including orientations on controversial issues such as asylum law, military operations or welfare state reform. In contrast, directive *democracy* education is concerned with the way such decisions are made in society and bind it as a collective; therefore, this education relates to the *mechanisms of representative democracy*. In directive democracy education, orientations are expected to be adopted that define the way individuals should perform their role as members of a democracy. Interestingly, directive *political* education can only be observed in the context of (informal) public pedagogies, while directive *democracy* education, despite being commissioned by political actors, takes place in (non-formal) pedagogical institutions.

In Germany, young people and adults acquire democratic role orientations usually within the frame of *non-directive* education for which, since the 1970s, a minimum consensus has emerged. Since then, non-directive civic education ('Politische Bildung') has followed three maxims. Firstly, political knowledge is taught considering all controversial views on the respective topic that are relevant in society. Secondly, teachers and adult educators must not impose a specific political stance on learners. On the contrary, they must, thirdly, enable them to develop their own political position (Wehling, 1977; see also, Kloubert, 2018, pp. 150-152). As Drerup (2021) observed:

> Classroom debates about controversial issues and the confrontation with a plurality of views that go along with it can … trigger individual self-reflection and collective

> democratic learning processes that enable students to broaden their personal and political perspectives and to learn to better understand and to tolerate other positions. (Drerup, 2021, p. 256)

In this way, *Bildung* can occur (Kloubert, 2018).

When non-directive political education works, when controversies are discussed and the addressees are empowered to form their own opinions, this process also has a *directive* educational effect. The process has this effect because only as far as the political Weltanschauung is concerned do pedagogical activities function according to the principles of the minimum consensus as noted previously and, therefore, constitute non-directive education. However, these maxims themselves educate, in a directive way, those participants who are not yet conditioned to endure controversy and to strive for their own political orientation. To endure controversy is part of the 'taboo zone that is excluded from the space that has been cleared for contradiction and conflict' (Grammes, 1998, pp. 244-245; translated by the author).

This phenomenon is notably evident in the orientation courses designed for adult immigrants. Within these programs, sanctions are employed as a means to encourage the embrace of democratic role orientations. Many new immigrants are obliged by the German authorities to participate in a 100-hour orientation course after completing language training. Anyone who does not participate is denied a permanent residence permit. However, those who successfully pass the final test fulfil one of the requirements for becoming a German citizen. It is in these orientation courses, in which over three million adult immigrants participated between 2004 and 2023 (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2023), that directive democracy education becomes most obvious. First, the state constructs these migrants 'as a threat and a disturbance, [as people] who have to be regulated and got under control' (Heinemann & Sarabi, 2020, p. 313). The curriculum, which is set by a federal authority, includes knowledge about the history, culture and political structure of Germany. However, beyond this – and this is typical of directive adult education – the curriculum pursues 'affective learning goals' that 'aim at a positive evaluation and support of democracy and the basic rights in the Basic Law', as the state authority that supervises these courses expressed it (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2017, p. 8; translated by the author).

Directive democracy education is particularly evident in the textbooks associated with this course. In addition to many interesting facts that the course participants learn about Germany, they also find exercises that require them to discuss controversial topics. For example, one textbook asks students to discuss the housing shortage in Germany. The participants are supposed to form two parties, one collecting arguments in favour of building high-rise buildings instead of parks, and the other to develop counterarguments. Then the two parties are supposed to discuss the issue. Finally, the textbook asks course participants to 'agree in the end' (Butler et al., 2017, p. 45: translated by the author). Other textbooks provide similar exercises.

Including such an exercise in textbooks implies that the course participants are assumed to have a deficit in their ability to discuss controversies in an orderly manner and to subsequently arrive at an appropriate compromise. This assumption serves as the prerequisite for communicating to the participants the expectation that they adopt certain democratic role orientations. Insofar as these orientation courses for new immigrants contain such components of directive adult education, they 'only serve to support and reproduce the current system; they do not promote the development of independent and politically-active thinkers' (Kloubert, 2020, p. 131).

Directive education for the common good

In the orientation courses, immigrants are educated in democracy and are familiarised with the correct behaviour regarding gender and sexual orientations (cf. Heinemann & Sarabi, 2020, p. 313), the rules of domestic coexistence and waste separation practices. This constitutes a third form of directive education that, in general, is aimed at everyone, not just at adolescents and adult immigrants – examples of newcomers in society.

Directive education for the common good was found in those areas of society where politics has only limited access, where either no laws have been passed, or, laws exist but are not sufficient to ultimately define citizens' behaviour. Waste separation is an example. Although Germany has elaborate rules regarding citizens' waste separation practices, sometimes with severe sanctions for non-compliance, right down to municipal waste regulations, a major lack of control exists because the public order office cannot establish a guard at every waste bin. That is why waste management companies started directively educating the population in the 1990s.

For example, the municipal cleaning company of Berlin tried to cognitively convince its customers to recognise the value of waste separation by referring to climate protection. Besides, attaching 'cool' slogans to waste bins is seen to give waste separation an aura of goodness. Or, feedback strategies show citizens what has been achieved with waste separation. Moreover, as Lüdemann (2004, p. 77; translated by the author) showed, some waste companies also use 'pillorying strategies', through which red cards are stuck on incorrectly filled bins. Communication on the topic of waste separation provides what is probably the most successful example of directive education for the common good, as waste separation has become a widely incorporated routine in German society.

Building new readiness to act in everyday life is the central concern of directive education for the common good. However, what counts as the common good depends on the educators' perspective. Nowhere is this clearer than in directive labour education. As early as the beginning of the 20th century, Max Weber noted that capitalism 'educates and selects the economic subjects which it needs through a process of economic survival of the fittest' (2005, p. 20). Because 'economic survival' is now cushioned by the welfare state, the latter has become a 'veritable educational agency' and a 'training institution for social action', as Stephan Lessenich (2012, p. 57; translated by the author) put it. This is particularly evident in the German welfare state reform of 2003, initiated by the Social Democrat Party mentioned previously. Following the reform, unemployment benefits were no longer based on entitlement alone but also required the unemployed individual to actively seek work, with employment agencies lending weight to this stipulation. This applied even more strongly to the secondary unemployment benefit allotted after 12 or 18 months of unemployment. In this case, 'the principle of support is' – as the federal employment agency expressed it – 'on an equal footing with the principle of demand' (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2021, p. 16; translated by the author). Here, too, the expected orientation – to accept any job – is accompanied by clear threats of sanctions, above all, the withdrawal of money. Critics have pointed out that these laws push people towards 'market-oriented self-education' and, thus, towards a 'practice of everyday subjectively doing capitalism' even before they are directly educated by employment agencies because everybody aims to avoid unemployment with its degradation and control in the first place (Lessenich, 2012, p. 61; translated by the author).

Discussion

Whether it is a case of political education, education for democracy or education for the common good, an asymmetrical relation is established between the educators (the state, political leaders and other political actors) and those who are to be educated. The communicated *expectation* that specific orientations need to be adopted reflects that the educators attest to an (orientation) deficit on the part of those being educated; they construct them as 'persons in need' (Heinemann & Sarabi, 2020, p. 312). At the same time, the educators diagnose their counterparts' ability to act according to the expectation and to make the requested action (such as waste separation) a habit, while they also assume that those to be educated would not act in this way out of their own will. Implicit in this is the assumption of a gap in competence and legitimacy between educators and those to be educated. Furthermore, this asymmetry of the relationship makes it possible to underpin the expectation of orientations with sanctions.

Such an asymmetrical relationship can be criticised as constituting an expression of (benevolent) *paternalism*.[5] A paternalistic attitude is usually considered problematic but indispensable for pedagogical practices. Because children and adolescents are assumed to have limited autonomy and maturity, paternalism seems legitimate. Such a 'weak' system of paternalism comes into play when and where those to be educated cannot make rationally thought out, mature decisions (Feinberg, 1971; Giesinger, 2019).

However, adults must be assumed to have the ability to make their own decisions. If the adoption of certain orientations is expected from them, these attempts at directive education represent instances of 'strong' paternalism because the autonomy of these adults is temporarily and partially disregarded (Feinberg, 1971). While the autonomy of adults should be fostered rather than disregarded (Hoggan-Kloubert & Hoggan, 2023), that does not mean that paternalism towards adults is always illegitimate. In any case, in adult education (Fuhr, 2013), but also in the state and society (Drerup, 2020, p. 248), paternalism is inherent in several processes. For example, adults are obliged by their employers to take part in further education courses. They are also prohibited by the state to consume illegal drugs. Therefore, for each specific situation, the critique of adult education's paternalism must be weighed against other values. To illustrate this one could ask whether strong paternalism during a pandemic response is justified because it can save lives?

Beyond questions of legitimisation, Kloubert (2018, p. 155) reminded adult educators that a connection exists between paternalism and learning resistance: 'To recognize the (adult) learner as an autonomous being means to give him or her full respect, to recognize his or her life experience and motives as well as his or her resistance, and to deal with it carefully'. Otherwise, 'learning resistance and avoidance reactions arise in adults when they have the impression that they are being taught or 're-educated'' (Siebert, 2009, p. 321; translated by the author).

Another point of criticism relates to whether the directive education of adults by political actors unduly 'educationalizes' (Smeyers & Depaepe, 2008, p. 8) political problems. Usually, 'educationalization' or 'pedagogization' (Depaepe et al., 2008) means that political problems are delegated to the education system to be dealt with in schools or adult education institutions (see Depaepe et al., 2008). In the context of my research, however, pedagogization especially points to the transfer of pedagogical semantics and practices from the education system to politics (see Lüdemann, 2004; Klinge et al., 2024; Nohl, 2022a, 2022b) – a phenomenon that is also referred to in the discussion on public pedagogies.

In *directive political education,* the pedagogical diffuses into the political system. On the surface, this serves to generate approval for the U-turn of a party, for example, for the militarisation of foreign policy by the Greens. At the same time, however, such U-turns have enabled a course to be set for society as a whole, which could not simply have been pushed through using power. For in the Federal Republic of Germany, which is sometimes described as a 'consociational democracy' (Schmidt, 2008, p. 90), central socio-political decisions require a broad consensus, which could not have been achieved without those parties that had to make a U-turn. Such a broad social mainstream would probably not have been possible without pedagogical means, or stated another way, without directive education that affected adults' orientations and attitudes. However, such directive political education can also be experienced by adults as incapacitation.

Directive democracy education can be discussed with reference to a general problem of democracies: 'The liberal secularised state lives on preconditions that it cannot guarantee itself' (Böckenförde, 1976, p. 61; translated by the author). Most importantly, democratic attitudes cannot be enforced by law. Here, the state delegates the educational mandate to the education system, which, according to its own standards and logic, uses pedagogical means to encourage people newly arrived in society, whether they are young people or adult immigrants, to adopt a positive attitude towards representative democracy. As this is not about specific collective decisions but about the principle of consent to and participation in democratic decision-making processes, this pedagogization of politics seems legitimate, and it also shows the limits of the power of the political.

Directive education for the common good also works against these limits of political power. At the precise point where politics does not delegate education for the common good to the education system and, instead, resorts to pedagogization itself, a central problem of the political becomes virulent: while the political system is only capable of providing collectively binding decisions but cannot determine the impact of these decisions on other areas of society, political actors are often attributed a 'steering competence for the whole' – or they arrogate this to themselves (Nassehi, 2016, p. 34; translated by the author). This situation became glaringly obvious in the crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic: politicians were expected to contain the pandemic, although this could only be done by the entire population. Under such circumstances, chancellor Angela Merkel decided to address the population directly (see also Klinge et al., 2024). In her Bundestag speech quoted in this article, the chancellor appealed to all people not only to abide by the coronavirus rules but also to admonish each other to observe them. This act of replacing politics with directive education not only marks the limits of politics but also underlines the high, albeit controversial, importance of directive adult education in democracies.

Conclusion

While empirical analyses are contingent upon being informed by fundamental theoretical concepts, such as the notion of directive education, it is imperative to maintain a strict delineation between the empirical analysis and the normative evaluation of the findings it yields. As elucidated in the preceding section, my empirical analyses can be linked to substantive normative discussions. Furthermore, concerning the empirical study, which hitherto remains purely exploratory and confined to Germany, there exist myriad opportunities for further empirical investigations. On the one hand, an investigation could be undertaken to ascertain whether similar forms of directive adult education can be identified in other countries. Potential cross-country variations could prompt inquiries into whether certain forms of directive adult education are specific to particular social

formations and political cultures. On the other hand, an inquiry could also examine whether additional actors, such as trade unions, city councils or large associations, are engaged in directive adult education alongside the political actors I singled out in my analysis. In this regard, the two theses of this paper – political actors educate adults, and in doing so, they communicatively and overtly expect them to adopt certain orientations – might contribute to stimulate debates in adult education.

Notes

[1] Concerning the three forms of directive education for adults see in detail: Nohl (2022a).

[2] As Randour et al. (2020, p. 439) made clear, there is a lack of empirical research on political discourses, as far as 'the circulation of frames both from a top-down (i.e. from the political elites down to civil society actors) and a bottom-up (i.e. from civil society actors to political elites) perspective' is concerned. The present inquiry serves to provide insights into educational aspects of the top-down perspective.

[3] The official name is 'Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen', signalling the cooperation of the West German Green party with an ecologist and leftist opposition group of East Germany.

[4] For my interpretation for this and the following quotes, I used an authorised transcript of Joschka Fischer's speech that can be found in the archives of the Green Party. The transcript deviates at times from the original speech (cf. Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 2010).

[5] See also Heinemann and Sarabi's (2020) discussion on 'paternalistic benevolence'.

Declaration of conflicting interests

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

Acknowledgement

I wish to extend my appreciation to the anonymous reviewers, the journal editors, the English language editor, and Nils Bernhardsson-Laros for their valuable assistance in enhancing this article.

References

Biesta, G. (2011). The ignorant citizen: Mouffe, Rancière, and the subject of democratic education. *Studies in the Philosophy of Education* 30, 141-153. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-011-9220-4

Biesta, G. (2014). Making Pedagogy Public – For the Public, of the Public, or in the lnterest of Publicness? In J. Burdick, J. A. Sandlin, & M. P. O'Malley (Eds.), *Problematizing Public Pedagogy* (pp. 15-25). Routledge.

Bohnsack, R. (2014). Documentary Method. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* (pp. 217-233). Sage.

Brighouse, H. (1998). Civic education and liberal legitimacy. *Ethics*, *108*(4), 719-745. https://doi.org/10.1086/233849

Brookfield, S. (2004). Racializing and concretizing Gramsci in contemporary adult education practice. *Interchange, 35*, 375-384. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02698885

Brookfield, S. (2009). On being taught. In P. Jarvis (Ed.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Lifelong Learning* (pp. 214-222). Routledge.

Bundesagentur für Arbeit. (2021). *SGB II – Arbeitslosengeld II / Sozialgeld. Grundsicherung für Arbeitsuchende. Merkblatt [SGB II – Unemployment benefit II / social welfare benefits. Basic income support for jobseekers. Leaflet]*. https://www.arbeitsagentur.de/datei/merkblatt-algii_ba015397.pdf

Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge. (2017). *Curriculum für einen bundesweiten Orientierungskurs. Überarbeitete Neuauflage für 100 UE* [Curriculum for a nationwide orientation course. Revised new edition for 100 units]. https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Integration/Integrationskurse/Kurstraeger/KonzepteLeitfaeden/curriculum-orientierungskurs-pdf.pdf?__blob=publicationFile.
Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge. (2023). *Integrationskursgeschäftsstatistik für das erste Halbjahr 2023* [Integration course statistics for the first half of 2023]. https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Statistik/Integrationskurszahlen/Bundesweit/2023-integrationskursgeschaeftsstatistik-gesamt_bund.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=6
Bündnis 90/Die Grünen. (2010, October 26). *Joschka Fischer auf dem Kosovo-Sonderparteitag in Bielefeld 1999* [Joschka Fischer at the Kosovo Special Party Congress in Bielefeld 1999] [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/7jsKCOTM4Ms?si=IckbuLeJcrAq02HJ
Butler, E., Kotas, O., Sturm, M., Sum, B., Wolf, N.E., & Würtz, H. (2017). *100 Stunden Deutschland. Orientierungskurs Politik – Geschichte – Kultur* [100 hours Germany. Orientation course Politics – History – Culture]. Klett.
Böckenförde, E.-W. (1976). Die Entstehung des Staates als Vorgang der Säkularisation [The emergence of the state as a process of secularization]. In E.-W. Böckenförde, *Staat, Gesellschaft, Freiheit. Studien zu Staatstheorie und Verfassungsrecht* (pp. 42-64). Suhrkamp.
Copp, D. (2016). Moral education versus indoctrination. *Theory and Research in Education 14*, 149-167. https://doi.org/10.1177/1477878516656563
Depaepe, M., Herman, F., Surmont, M., Van Gorp, A., & Simon, F. (2008). About Pedagogization: From the Perspective of the History of Education. In P. Smeyers & M. Depaepe (Eds.), *Educational Research: the Educationalization of Social Problems* (pp. 13-30). Springer.
Deutscher Bundestag (2020). *Stenographischer Bericht, 179. Sitzung (Plenarprotokoll 19/179)* [Stenographic report, 179th session (Plenary protocol 19/179)]. https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/19/19179.pdf
Drerup, J. (2020). Paternalismus [Paternalism]. In G. Weiß & J. Zirfas (Eds.), *Handbuch Erziehungs- und Bildungsphilosophie* (pp. 245-256). Springer.
Drerup, J. (2021). Democratic education and the limits of toleration. How to respond to extremism in the classroom. *Pedagogiek 41*(3), 251-271. https://doi.org/10.5117/PED2021.3.003.DRER
Feinberg, J. (1971). Legal Paternalism. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy, 1*(1), 105-124. https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.1971.10716012
Fejes, A., & Nicoll, K. (2008) (Eds.). *Foucault and lifelong learning – Governing the subject*. Routledge.
Fischer, J. M. (1995, July 30). Die Katastrophe in Bosnien und die Konsequenzen für unsere Partei [The catastrophe in Bosnia and the consequences for our party]. *Blätter*, *9*. https://www.blaetter.de/ausgabe/1995/september/die-katastrophe-in-bosnien-und-die-konsequenzen-fuer-unsere-partei
Fuhr, T. (2013). Erwachsene als freie Lerner – Kritik eines Modells [Adults as independent learners – Criticism of a model]. *DIE – Zeitschrift für Erwachsenenbildung*, *4*, 29-32. http://www.diezeitschrift.de/42013/erwachsenenbildung-04.pdf
Giesinger, J. (2019). Paternalism and the Justification of Education. *Philosophical Inquiry in Education, 26*(1), 49-63. https://doi.org/10.7202/1071420ar
Giroux, H. A. (2004). Cultural Studies and the Politics of Public Pedagogy: Making the Political More Pedagogical. *Parallax, 10*(2), 73-89. https://doi.org/10.1080/1353464042000208530
Grammes, T. (1998). *Kommunikative Fachdidaktik* [Communicative subject-specific didactics]. Leske + Budrich.
Grube, N. (2015). Make the Nation safe for mass society: Debates about propaganda and education in the United States in the twentieth century. In C. Aubry, M. Geiss, V. Magyar-Haas, & J. Oelkers (Eds.), *Education and the State* (pp. 178-195). Taylor & Francis.
Heinemann, A. M. B., & Sarabi, S. A. (2020). Paternalistic benevolence – Enabling violence. Teaching the hegemonic language in a double bind. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, 11*(3), 309-320. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.ojs1712
Hoggan-Kloubert, T., & Hoggan, C. (2023). Post-Truth as an Epistemic Crisis: The Need for Rationality, Autonomy, and Pluralism. *Adult Education Quarterly, 73*(1), 3-20. https://doi.org/10.1177/07417136221080424
Holzer, D. (2024). Wie Erwachsenenerziehung weiterdenken? [How to take adult education further?] *Debatte 2023*, *6*(1), 63-78. https://doi.org/10.3224/debatte.v6i1.07
Huster, S. (2014). Grundfragen staatlicher Erziehungsambitionen [Basic questions of state educational ambitions]. In E. Schumann (Ed.), *Das erziehende Gesetz. 16. Symposion der Kommission ‚Die Funktion des Gesetzes in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (pp. 193-225). De Gruyter.

Klinge, D., Nohl, A.-M., & Schäffer, B. (2024). Adult Emergency Education: The Tacit Andragogical Fight against the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Studies in the Education of Adults,* 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2024.2402064
Kloubert, T. (2018). Propaganda as a (new) Challenge of Civic Education. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, 9*(2), 139-159. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.ojs257
Kloubert, T. (2020). Democracy Education in the Context of German “Orientation Courses” for Migrants. In T. Kloubert (Ed.), *Erwachsenenbildung und Migration* (pp. 115-132). Springer VS.
Lessenich, S. (2012). Der Sozialstaat als Erziehungsagentur [The welfare state as an educational agency]. *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 49/50, 55-61. https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/150630/der-sozialstaat-als-erziehungsagentur/
Lüdemann, J (2004). *Edukatorisches Staatshandeln. Steuerungstheorie und Verfassungsrecht am Beispiel der staatlichen Förderung von Abfallmoral* [Educational state action. Governance theory and constitutional law using the example of state promotion of waste ethics]. Nomos.
Mannheim, K. (1952). On the Interpretation of Weltanschauung. In K. Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (pp. 33-83). Oxford University Press.
Mannheim, K. (1954). *Ideology and Utopia*. Harcourt, Brace and Co./Routledge and Kegan Paul.
Mannheim, K. (1999). *Conservatism – A Contribution to the Sociology of Knowledge. Collected Works, Vol. XI.* Routledge.
Mannheim, K. (2000). Competition as a Cultural Phenomenon. In K. Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge. Collected Works, Vol. V.* (pp. 191-229). Routledge.
Mezirow, J. (1978). Perspective transformation. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *28*(2), 100-110. https://doi.org/10.1177/074171367802800202
Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to Think Like an Adult – Core Concepts of Transformation Theory. In J. Mezirow & Associates (Eds.), *Learning as Transformation. Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (pp. 3-33). Jossey-Bass.
Nassehi, A. (2016). *Die Wiedergewinnung des Politischen. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Wahlverweigerung und kompromisslosem politischem Protest* [The recovery of the political. An examination of electoral refusal and no-compromise political protest]. KAS.
Nohl, A.-M. (2016). Dokumentarische Methode und die Interpretation öffentlicher Diskurse [Documentary method and the interpretation of public discourse]. *Zeitschrift für Diskursforschung, 4*(2), 116-136.
Nohl, A.-M. (2022a). *Erziehende Demokratie – Orientierungszumutungen für Erwachsene* [Educating democracy - Orientation impositions for adults]. Springer VS.
Nohl, A.-M. (2022b). Between Bildung and Erziehung: Mass Education during the Pandemic. In E. Ata & F. Mızıkacı (eds.), *Critical Pedagogies and Covid-19 Pandemic – Keeping Communities Together in the Times of Crisis* (pp. 167-186). Bloomsbury.
Prange, K., & Strobel-Eisele, G. (2015). *Die Formen des pädagogischen Handelns* [The forms of pedagogical action]. Kohlhammer.
Randour, F., Perrez, J., & Reuchamps, M. (2020). Twenty years of research on political discourse: A systematic review and directions for future research. *Discourse & Society*, *31*(4), 428-443. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926520903526
Sander W. (2004). Incitement to freedom: Competencies of political education in a world of difference. *The Development Education Journal*, *11*(1), 9-11. https://doi.org/10.25656/01:6118
Sandlin, J. A., Burdick, J., & O’Malley, M. P. (2011). Mapping the Complexity of Public Pedagogy Scholarship: 1894-2010. *Review of Educational Research*, *81*(3), 338-375. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654311413395
Sarcinelli, U. (2010). Strategie und politische Kommunikation. Mehr als die Legitimation des Augenblicks. Strategie in der Politikwissenschaft [Strategy and political communication. More than the legitimization of the moment]. In J. Raschke & R. Tils (Eds.), *Strategie in der Politikwissenschaft* (pp. 267-298). Springer VS.
Savage, G. C. (2014). Chasing the phantoms of public pedagogy: Political, popular, and concrete publics. In J. Burdick, J. A. Sandlin, & M. P. O’Malley (Eds.), *Problematizing Public Pedagogy* (pp. 79-90). Routledge.
Schmidt, M. (2008). Germany: The Grand Coalition State. In J. M. Colomer (Ed.), *Comparative European Politics* (pp. 58-93). Routledge.
Schwab-Trapp, M. (2002). *Kriegsdiskurse – Die politische Kultur des Krieges im Wandel 1991-1999* [Discourses of war – The changing political culture of war 1991-1999]. Leske + Budrich.
Siebert, H. (2009). Lernen im Erwachsenenalter konstruktivistisch betrachtet [A constructivist view of learning in adulthood]. *Erwägen – Wissen – Ethik 20*(2), 320-322.

Smeyers, P., & Depaepe, M. (2008). Introduction-Pushing social responsibilities: The educationalization of social problems. In P. Smeyers, & M. Depaepe (Eds.), *Educational research: The educationalization of social problems* (pp. 1-11). Springer.
Weber, M. (2005). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Routledge.
Wehling, H.-G. (1977). Konsens á la Beutelsbach? [Consensus à la Beutelsbach?] In S. Schiele, & H. Schneider (Eds.), *Das Konsensproblem in der politischen Bildung* (pp. 173-184). Klett.

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2025, pp. 75-96

Ageing and complexity: Reframing older adults' learning through interdisciplinary lenses

Laura Formenti
University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy (laura.formenti@unimib.it)

Davide Cino
University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy (davide.cino@unimib.it)

Francesca Loberto
University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy (f.loberto@campus.unimib.it)

Abstract

This paper presents a critical literature review on the systemic interconnections between ageing, learning, and care. Using the lenses of complexity and interdisciplinarity, we analysed a sample of 62 papers published between 2003 and 2022, examining their reference to micro, meso and/or macro levels, theoretical depth, and use of complexity as a sensitizing concept to understand implications for learning and transformation as structural features of an ageing society. Our analysis highlighted the role of different settings of care (formal, informal, and technology-mediated) in shaping, enhancing, or hindering meaning, well-being, and social justice for older learners and their caregivers, and the implications for society at large. Findings suggest a gap in the examined literature regarding the use of complexity theories to highlight self-organisation, interdependence, and co-evolution of individual and systemic learning. A theoretical interdisciplinary framework, we contend, would better mirror the multiple factors and levels entailed in the process of ageing.

Keywords: ageing, complexity theory, healthcare, caregivers, technology-mediated care

ISSN 2000-7426

© 2024 The authors
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/
http://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.5193
www.rela.ep.liu.se

Introduction

The transition towards a society where longevity is 'the new normal' requires a change of paradigm that entails, besides individual learning, the consideration of multiple transformations in relationships, professional practices and attitudes, services' organisation, and policies. From the individual perspective, learning to become an older person and adapt to new life conditions is a non-linear process emerging from daily interactions with oneself, others, and the environment, coping with new events, accidents, and dilemmas, taking and sharing decisions, and implementing new routines. Older adults' learning also entails letting go, finding new balances, and dealing with the Big Questions of life (Formenti & West, 2018). The establishment of new relational balances, identities, and good or bad outcomes in terms of health, well-being, and meaning, does not just depend on individual strategies of adaptation (microlevel), but on systemic and entangled factors at the meso and macrolevel.

Age-It is a national multidisciplinary research program devoted to mainstreaming ageing in Italian society, among the oldest in the world. It created a scientific hub for new ideas, practices, and policies, involving over 600 scholars from the biomedical, social, and technological sciences, to address ten challenges related to health, social justice, care, economy, work, ethics, technology, and education. Within this program, we formed an interdisciplinary group representing education, sociology, economy, technology, and gerontology to build a study devoted to understanding how ageing is constructed by different actors and answered to by the local communities. We will conduct interviews and cooperative inquiry sessions with older adults, informal and formal caregivers, and decision makers, to map emerging needs, problems, and resources, to signal challenges, and to suggest improvements. Fieldwork will connect qualitative and quantitative data within a participatory framework to highlight the experience, meaning, and agency of older people in co-evolution with their environment. We represent them as a diverse intersectional group, not only 'patients' or 'vulnerable' citizens, but lifelong learners, women and men whose backgrounds, social situations, biographies, interests, and relationships matter in the way they evolve. We use a comprehensive critical theory of learning in later life (Formosa, 2012; Withnall, 2009, 2011) to identify the effects of marginalisation and disempowerment on older adults, due to structural and discursive features within the system of care, and the informal learning processes involving family carers, professionals, decision makers, and other relevant actors in the system.

This literature review investigates the epistemic power of complexity as a sensitising theoretical concept that illuminates the interplay of many factors and levels, beyond the dominant focus on individuals, their health, and the measurement of isolated variables. We are dissatisfied with the hegemonic paradigm that neglects the heterogeneity of older adults' experiences and the role of intersectionality (gender, class, religion, education, place of living, etc.) in the transition to new life conditions. Linear practices and policies trivialise ageing and dispossess older adults from their rights to freedom, well-being, and meaning. A new paradigm is needed to (re)frame the meaning of learning in later life, that may be lost in transition with heavy effects on individuals, families, and communities.

By referring to complexity in adult education and learning (Formenti, 2018), we invoke a radical change of paradigm, based on co-evolution, circularity, self-organisation, and entanglement. Our review explores whether and how complexity theories are used by researchers to inspire new narratives, actions, and policies, and to cope with longevity as an opportunity.

Why complexity

In the last decades, interest in complexity has grown fast in organisational sciences (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000) and health policies (Braithwaite et al., 2017; Greenhalgh & Papoutsi, 2018). Its development in adult education research is slower and marginal (Alhadeff-Jones, 2009, Fenwick, 2003, 2016; Formenti, 2018), so we hope to fuel it by using the lens of complex systems theory (von Foerster, 1973/1984, 1982; Morin, 2008) to focus on learning, that is adaptation, interdependence, self-organization, and co-evolution, as cross-cutting features of individual lives, as well as relationships, groups, organisations, and networks. All systems, at all levels, 'learn' by interacting with a transforming social and material environment. This interaction is circular and produces unpredictability. The traditional approaches to ageing, however, seek predictability and enforce top-down strategies on individuals, groups, and communities to keep the situation under control and to solve emerging problems by linear answers. Research on policies has shown that the enforcement of increased regulations, guidelines, standard procedures, performance indicators in the healthcare system fails in guaranteeing to citizens quality of living, social justice, and even the consistent adoption of the prescribed behaviours (Braithwaite et al., 2017). Micro transitions and adaptations that work locally happen notwithstanding or beyond the given rules. Control fails.

Complex systems, in fact, are self-organised, layered, and entangled (Nowak & Hubbard, 2009). At the microlevel, individual identity evolves and (new) meaning is built whenever it is necessary to adapt and calibrate individual action to (new) emerging conditions. Brackets are here used to stress that learning is not always about the new: learning also is keeping a form, a habit, one's previous identity/ies, and this is especially important in later life. In complex systems theory, learning and living are different names for the same ongoing process. Hence, learning is biographically rooted: memories of the past combine with present interactions and the imagination of the future, to make and remake the individual (Formenti & West, 2018). Learners, at all ages, interpret events and information, interact with oneself, the others, and the environment (objects, spaces, procedures), coherently with their previous life and structure, constructing meaning and identity (Fenwick, 2003; Formenti, 2018).

At the meso-level, however, individuals are interdependent, especially within their proximal systems of relationships: family, workplace, friends, community/ies. Connectedness, circularity, repetition, and a constant flux of information are the main features of meso-systems, where every action is embedded in circuits of inter-actions. The meso-system enforces and reinforces expected behaviours, identities, and meanings through shared scripts, rituals, and narratives, objects and spaces, shaping lives and identities within organised activities (regularities, rules) and normative expectations. Complex organisations are dynamic and transform in relation to a changing environment. Structures and patterns *emerge* (Braithwaite et al., 2017) from a process of self-organisation where every part acts on the basis of tacit rules established in time by co-existence.

Complexity, then, brings our attention beyond individual paths, to comprise the context, which is not simply a backdrop or inactive container for human behaviour (Formenti, 2019), but the composition of 'many "moving parts" in complex interventions' (May et al., 2016, p. 3). When we look at education and learning, any action is connected to a context sustaining, reinforcing, or hindering it: their entanglement is another feature of complex systems (Hynes et al., 2020). 'Contexts are dynamic: contextual factors that might constitute barriers to implementation in one place may facilitate it in others' (May et al., 2016, p. 2).

These ideas pushed us to interrogate the literature on ageing, looking for clues of complexity, and the presence of different levels in interpreting the role of adaptive systems in the ageing society. By this, we intend to fuel a discussion on complexity in the field of older adult education.

Methodology: A critical literature review

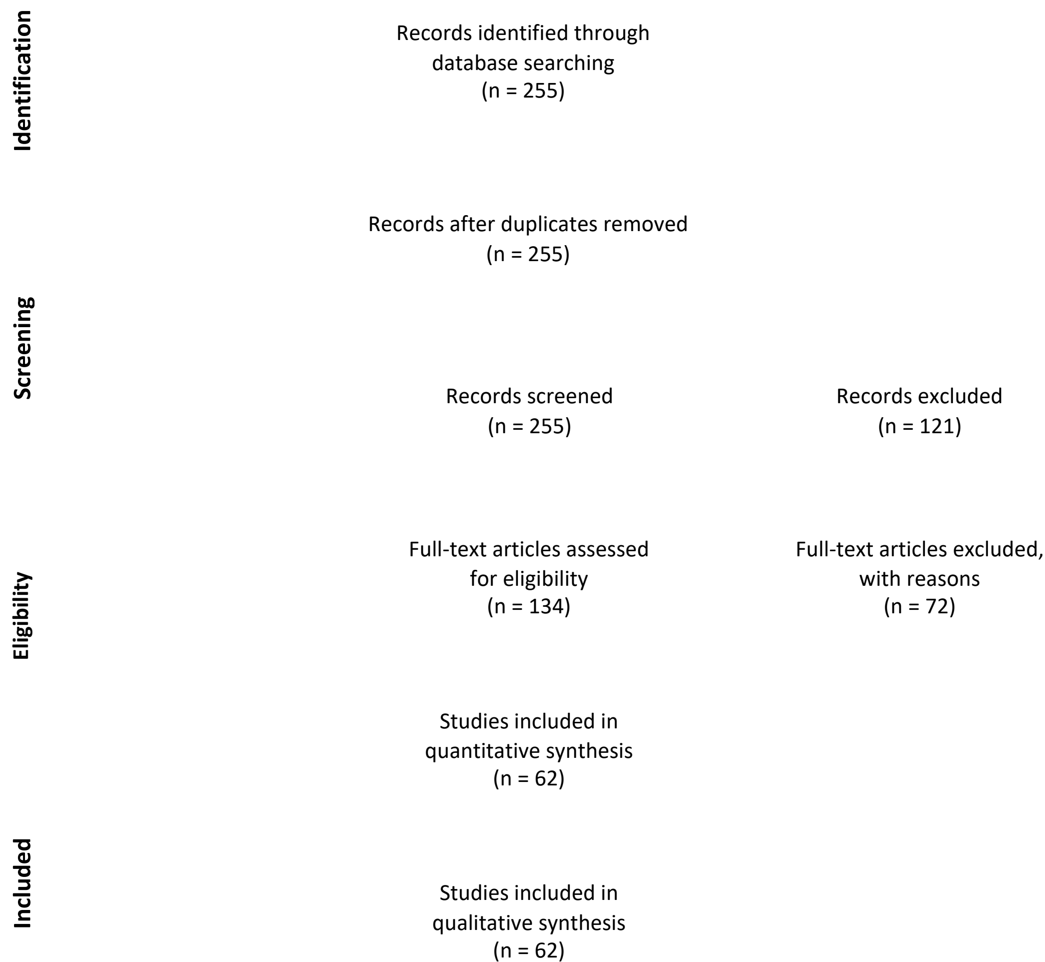
Inspired by Grant and Booth (2009) in their classification of literature review methodologies, we opted for a 'critical review', whose aim, compared to standard literature reviews, is to move beyond a solely descriptive account, to offer a reflexive and critical interpretation concerning key areas (better outlined in the paragraph below). Critical analysis is here used to sustain the construction of a conceptual model based on mapping the literature, enriching our theoretical framing of ageing and developing new ideas, hypotheses, and research questions around learning.

We operated our query on Scopus using the following keywords: ageing or aging, or elderly, or older adult, complexity, health or care, communication, critic* or narrative, system*, caregiver. These words define a semantic field that interconnects ageing, care, and complexity with other relevant concepts. Following several attempts, we decided not to include 'education' or 'learning' to keep a larger interdisciplinary focus. In this paper, education is not our main focus per se; we are interested in everyday life and informal learning (Golding et al. 2009), that is always present, even if tacit. We contend that older adults learn about ageing by experiencing systemic interactions with people, things, spaces, and organizations, that invite (or push) them to re-think their relationship with a changing body, to make choices in relation to work, family, mobility, household, social life, to understand relevant information about their health, to navigate new contexts, and to calibrate their actions in relation to these manifold experiences and challenges, not least by negotiating identity and social roles.

Figure 1 reports on the process following the PRISMA flow diagram (Moher et al., 2009). A total of 255 items were retrieved, then double checked to remove duplicates and papers that were not specifically addressing ageing. We further filtered our sample to consider papers concerning people who can decide for themselves (not institutionalised, no dementia). This led to a final sample of 62 records that were analysed guided by the following research question:

RQ: To what extent, if at all, does this corpus of publications contribute to conceptualising ageing as a complex learning phenomenon?

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram.



Data analysis

We analysed our data through content and thematic analysis (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). With respect to content analysis, we developed a codebook and adjusted it iteratively using dialogue and reflexivity to reach discursive intercoder agreement through the convergence of different perspectives (Cornish et al., 2013). Content analysis included the following variables:

- Methodology: qualitative, quantitative, mixed, case study, literature review, theoretical.
- Theoretical conceptualization of ‘complexity’: the term is used just as a synonym of ‘difficult’, or it represents multiplicity (i.e., a plurality of variables, factors, or agents), or it makes explicit reference to complexity theories.
- Theoretical depth of the paper: absence of theory, or mere enunciation of theoretical concepts, or a fully developed theoretical frame.

- Levels of systemic analysis: the paper focuses the micro, meso, and/or macro-level.
- Care system involved: informal, and/or formal, and/or technology-mediated.

These variables are informed by our critical stance, since they focus the frameworks of meaning, methodological approaches, and theoretical depth of the publications in relation to our research question, allowing us to categorise the understanding of ageing as a linear, multifaceted, or complex phenomenon.

With respect to the thematic analysis of the full texts of the papers, we built on the care system variable, identifying three systems of care: informal, formal, and technology-mediated. Each of us analysed one theme and drew a concept map to represent 'meanings embedded in a framework of propositions' (Novak & Gowin, 1984, p. 15, as cited in Daley, 2004). Iterative sharing and discussing of our maps led to identifying a range of sub-areas and gave a provisional answer to our research question.

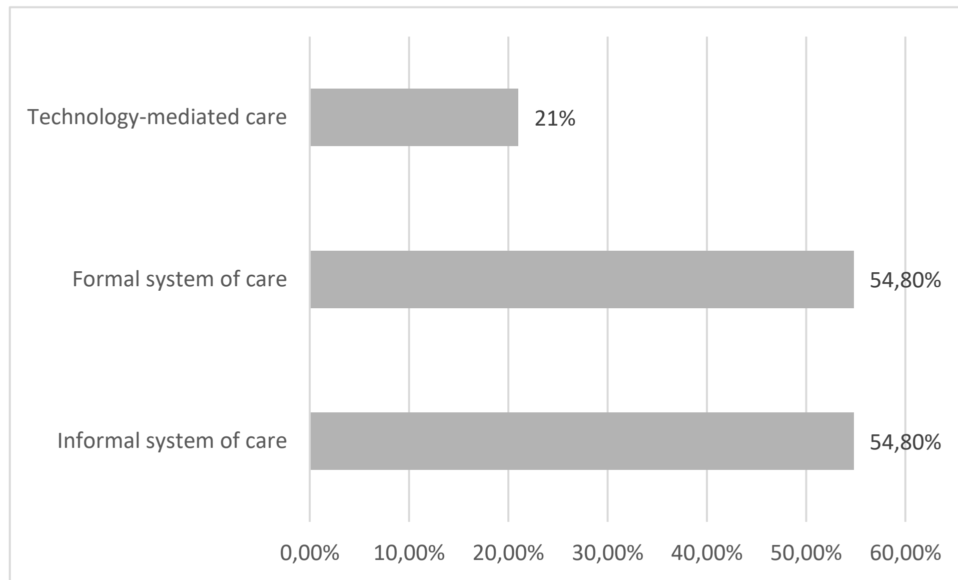
Mapping the territory: Findings from content analysis

By describing our sample, we want to reflect on the epistemic territory that we are exploring. We are interested in the epistemological turn entailed by using complexity to interpret ageing. Table 1 (in Appendix) shows our findings full length, with each record's full reference and the coded variables. With respect to the time of publication (2003 to 2022), Figure 2 shows a fluctuation reaching a peak in 2022. Hence, complexity seems an emerging and increasing concern in research on ageing, given that our sample is not representative.

Figure 2. Evolution in time - years of publication.

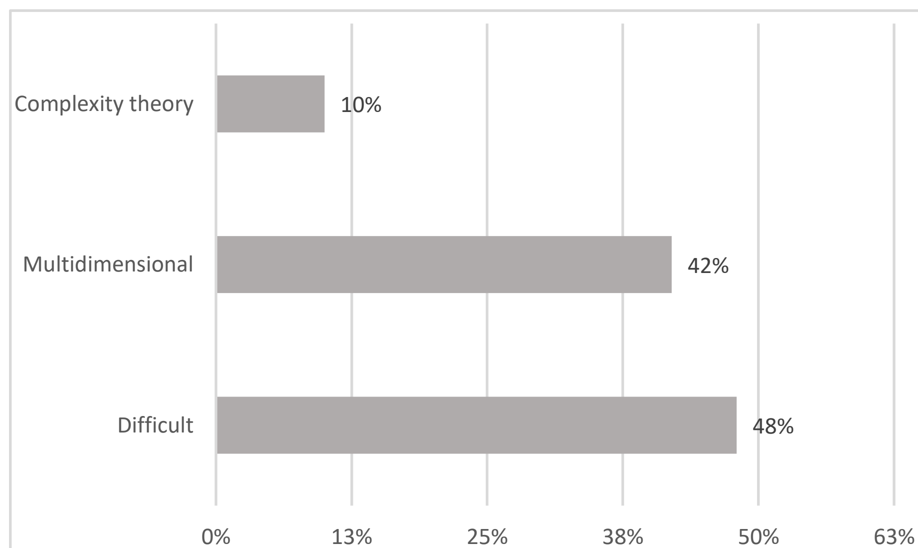
As for the care system focused by the papers, 54.8% of them concern the informal system, 54.8% the formal system, 21% technology-mediated care (Figure 3). These areas are the object of the following paragraph.

Figure 3. Care systems addressed in the papers.



As for 'complexity' (Figure 4), only 10% of the papers explicitly use complexity theories, while most papers (48%) use the word as a mere synonym of 'difficult', followed by those that interpret complexity just in terms of multidimensionality or multifactoriality (42%). These findings show, with respect to our sample, a gap in the literature that invites further research using complexity theory as a lens to studying ageing, as we will argue in our conclusions.

Figure 4. Meaning of 'complexity'.



As for theoretical depth (Figure 5), 46.8% developed or implemented a theoretical frame. A third of the papers (30.6%) are merely focused on empirical data, with no theoretical framework. The remaining 22.6% just enunciate one or more theoretical concepts, but no theoretical improvement or discussion based on the research results.

Figure 5. Degree of theoretical depth.

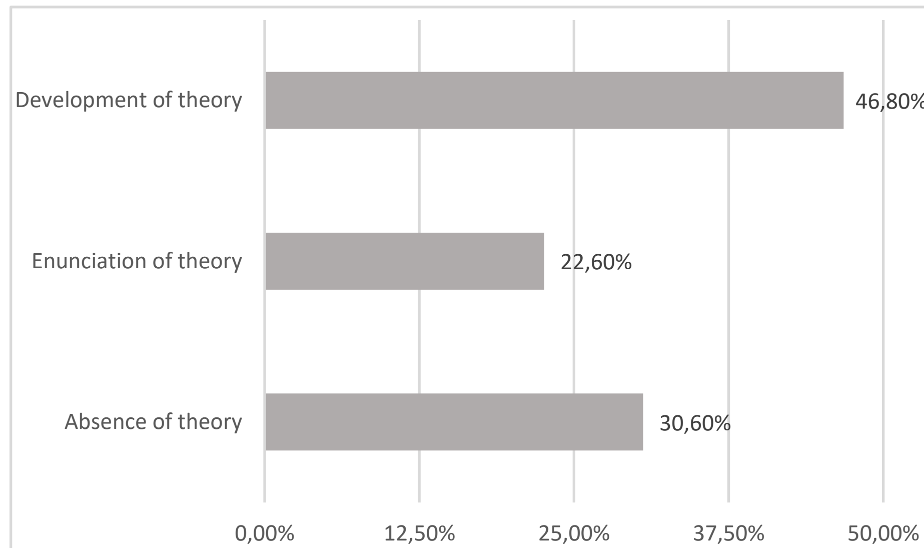
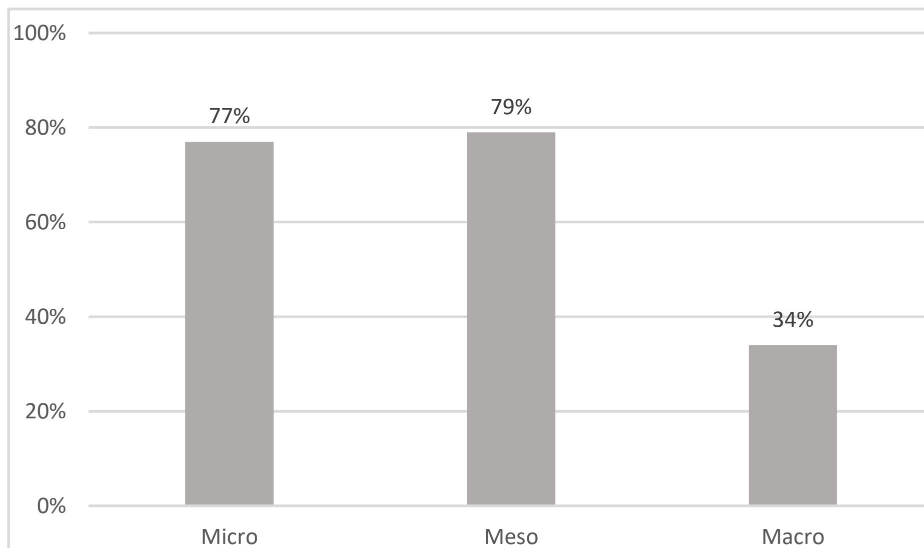


Figure 6 shows that most papers concern the micro (77%) and/or meso-level of analysis (79%), while 34% address the macro-level. A composite index shows a mean of 2 levels (*M*= 1.89, *SD*= .749) in each paper, mostly presenting the micro and meso together (40.3%). Totally, 21% of the papers consider them all (details in the Appendix).

Figure 6. Systemic levels of analysis.



So, while the macro level receives less attention, several researchers try to compose the layers. At the micro-level, these studies (e.g., Pereira et al., 2022; Majón-Valpuesta et al., 2022) focus on individual experience and strategies to construct ageing and oneself as an ageing person. At the meso-level (e.g., Hagedoorn et al., 2021; Schusselé Filliettaz et al., 2021), human groups, organisations, and contexts are seen as shaping this construction, creating both constraints and possibilities by structuring the everyday experiences of their members and users. At the macro-level (e.g., Griffore, 2019; Keating, 2022), the focus is on dominant and marginal discourses, local and national policies, cultural transformations, and environmental general conditions.

These findings show that only a part of the retrieved papers is coherent with our expectations: while there might be a growing interest for complexity related to ageing, only a few publications consider it as a specific theoretical frame for research. The balance between formal and informal care and the connections of micro and meso systems are coherent with a systemic perspective that tries to illuminate the links between subjective experience (individual learning) and transformations in the proximal systems (family, organisation), while a lesser interest for the macrosystem could indicate that social justice and social transformations are not a main concern. These arguments will be clearer after the thematic analysis.

Informal, formal, and technology-mediated systems of care: Findings from thematic analysis

The informal system of care: Interdependence, coevolution, and communication

In our mapping of 34 papers addressing the informal system of care, seven topics appeared relevant to our research question.

1. The crucial role of the family system. Many papers (12, 13, 14, 20, 22, 25, 31, 41 43, 46, 54) focus on the role of partners, companions, children and grandchildren as informal caregivers, introducing concepts as intergenerational care (20, 54), relational complexities (11), normative expectations about patterns and roles in care, e.g. gender stereotypes (20, 22, 54), the workload (11) as well as the positive of caregiving (22), the effects of family dynamics and history (20, 22, 25, 51, 59), the cultural construction of family values (35) such as solidarity (54), trust (25), abnegation (44), but also dependency and patriarchal practices (11), power (48), and the processes of co-evolution and shared coping between caregiver and care-receiver (13, 14, 59).
2. A focus on ageing as an ongoing non-linear process (transition) in search of a (new) balance, characterised by in-betweenness, unsettlement (25), transitional care (46), practices of handover and changes in health (25, 31, 46), continuity and discontinuity (25), cultural values as hindrances to the use of services (35), misrecognition (11), and adjustment processes (46). For instance, 'During the transition between hospital and home, older adults live an "in-between existence" at three levels: contextual, bodily and existential' (Roux et al., 2019, p. 6).
3. The daily impact of materiality, e.g. living arrangements (20), objects, time, space (25), medication practices (25, 31), on the quality of life, meaning, and possibility of ageing-in-place or self-determination (25). 'Several studies have demonstrated that, for home-dwelling older adults, the body space and home space are interconnected and co-vulnerable across the various dimensions of their homes as sites of long-term care' (Roux et al., 2019, p. 2).
4. The emergence of polarities, dilemmas, tensions, and boundaries, that can be seen as hindrances or, we suggest, occasions for reflection, learning and transformation, in a logic of composition: lifelong stressors/strengths (22), formal/informal care, private/public space, control/empowerment (25), visible/invisible care (58), facilitators/barriers (12).
5. The need for information (13, 14, 25, 31), communication (31), knowledge (13, 14, 35, 58), health literacy (13, 14) and mediation (48, 51) to sustain shared

decision making (11, 13, 22, 51), renegotiate boundaries (25), change representations (35, 39, 50), values (35), and balance power (25, 48).

6. Multiple social factors and 'intersectional complexities' (22) shape informal care: social determinants, gender and gendered caregiving (11, 12, 20, 22), cultural factors (11, 14, 35, 39, 43), income (22, 39), race, social class, employers' support (22, 39), corporate caring (52), religion and church community (22), migration (43), lifelong inequality (22), policies (48, 52), facilitators and spaces for social participation (12), marginalization (35), and cohort-specific effects (e.g. baby boomers, 12).
7. Complexity (13, 22) is a cross-cutting feature of relationships (11, 41), practices (25), informal care (58), meaning (50), rural ageing (35), intersectionality (21), and the overall healthcare ecosystem (13).

These topics show the interdependence of individual, relational, and societal factors. The dominant narrative of ageing as an individual process is challenged if we recognize the need for transformation at all levels. A systemic perspective, recognizing that learning is collective, lifelong, and diffused in the more-than-human system, would sustain policies and practices that pay attention to the wellbeing of the informal system, constituted by relationships among family members, companions, friends, as well as with objects, spaces (home), artefacts, and landscapes, and not separable from the formal system, but constantly interacting with it.

For example, Roux et al. (2019) study the management of medications after hospitalisation within the physical and symbolic space of home and daily routines. The transition entails a renegotiation of boundaries and identities, private space is transformed and small changes in everyday health-related practices (e.g., the management of a pillbox) can change older adults' life in subtle but significant ways. This awareness could inspire more respectful ways to accompany transitions.

Interdependence is evident in many papers. For example, using a developmental-contextual model, Berg and Upchurch (2007) show the co-evolution of couples dealing with chronic illness and suggest abandoning the separated study of care-receiver and care-giver, since these roles are frequently reciprocal in a couple, where partners share stressors, perceiving them as 'ours' rather than 'mine'. They also usually pool resources and make joint efforts at coping. The occurrence of health problems may disrupt previous balance and trigger action to restore homeostasis not only for the ill person, but in the relationship, and in relation to others too.

When some disruptive event (here, chronic illness) announces a transition to a new phase of life, the partners are called to complex learning: adaptation, self-development, emotional regulation, and changes in their relationship. We add that transformative learning is also possible (Mezirow, 1991), when the emerging dilemmas push individuals to reflect on their mindsets, habits, or worldviews, and change them. Learning and adaptation involve all the members of a social system. Berg and Upchurch (2007) present different strategies of dyadic coping: uninvolvement, support, collaboration, control, protective buffering, or overprotection. They are negotiated through communication and everyday action, and influenced by culture, gender, quality of relationship, and the impact of specific illnesses in terms of care burden, timeline, consequences, and controllability. Besides, dyadic coping changes across the lifespan, during specific phases of life and stages of illness (or other stressors). A couple can be unable to find (learn) a new balance, while another one will reinforce the relationship. None of this is predictable.

Such a co-evolutionary framework could be used to highlight changes in the whole system of informal care, also considering its relationships with the formal system. A

dyadic model, in fact, risks isolating the couple from other caregivers, increasing the burden and loneliness of the primary caregiver (usually a woman, due to gender normative expectations). When looking at the larger unit – family, proximal system, local community – co-evolution appears more complex, and the action of socio-cultural aspects more evident. Coping is a relational process depending on culture, gender roles, and other sociological variables.

In a similar vein, Bower et al. (2020) have used ethnography to study low-income mother-daughters dyads and explore

> how the women transitioned into the role of caregiver and care recipient, their relationship history, daily routines, living arrangements, health status, the intersection of work and family life, the impact of being low-income on their perceived well-being, and their broader family and support networks within the context of their family culture. (Bower et al., 2020, p. 136)

Here, caregiving is seen as the search of balance in a changing situation, weaving individual (health status and religion); family (dyadic relationship history, family involvement and expectations); and social factors (low-income, work environment, and community support). To balance their stress, mothers and daughters referred to other family members for emotional and instrumental support. The normative patterns of gender-based distribution of care in the family cumulate with inequity embedded in the larger society. Caregiving ultimately is a social practice: framing it as a private or family issue is problematic.

Formal systems: Professionals and organisations facing complexity

In mapping 34 papers addressing complexity in formal care, we identified 4 topics related to our research question:

1. Transitional care (e.g. discharge after hospitalization, referral from one service to another) is an emerging area of practice and research (3, 9, 10, 16, 30, 33, 41, 56) that considers and composes the different needs of patients, family members, and professionals, for example in medication management at home (33), or boundary negotiation in coordinated care (26). Communication and collaboration between different professionals, with patients and informal caregivers, are used to connect staff and family (57), nurses and physicians (32), to overcome gaps (37), and bring attention to speech (61) and voice (26). Patients' voices and values may be silenced by an overly strict application of professional guidelines, so narrative approaches can enable patients to make choices (10, 26). Effective communication, empathy, and collaboration fuel positive relationships with families and within interprofessional teams (19).
2. Health literacy and co-production of health as a value are critical for shared decision-making related to health. Partnership-based care recognizes the expertise of patients and informal caregivers about their priorities and needs (19). Health literacy, of both patient and companion, sustains more effective professional work; a companion with higher health literacy can play an active and informed role in decision-making, contributing to a collaborative patient-centred care approach (14).
3. Complexity-informed professional development and training can be pivotal in transforming formal caregivers' representations of ageing that are culturally based (4, 29), sometimes infused with ageism and preconceptions (38). New

needs for training emerge from the interactions with families to promote a collaborative and empathetic approach to family engagement (49). Training should go beyond skills development, to deal with 'the entire care situation and work organisation' (49, p. 70). The capacity to manage communication, divergent expectations and breakdowns would sustain collaboration by addressing in more effective ways the complexity of needs and different perspectives of professionals and users (19). Current medical education and clinical guidelines are not aligned with the multifaceted needs of older adults; health policies and procedures can constrain the quality of care (38). A huge integrative literature review (40) clarified how knowledge of the multiple components of professional work in the hospital could sustain better strategies, staff training, and resources. Older adults' human, social and financial capital also has to be considered in training professionals (24). A research in Norway (5) showed the positive impact of a program that promotes health in the community. Burnt-out workers are a growing problem in overly mechanistic, bureaucratic, and disconnected care systems, so the enhancement of personal connections with users and other professionals can increase the quality of professional experience and workers' empowerment.

4. Technologies are increasingly used in the care system to sustain collaboration and to integrate interventions. In a pilot study in Switzerland (19), homecare actors provided proactive and targeted information to the healthcare system; the project combined health innovation, interprofessional and interinstitutional collaboration, and partnership among patients, relatives, and professionals. Technology can sustain treatment management at home by offering personalised medication management plans, educational materials, and regular follow-up by healthcare professionals; for example, using the HOME tool improved medication adherence, perceived experience of older adults, and overall health outcomes (32).

These data suggest that a complexity framework can be used to empower professionals in positioning themselves more actively in the system of care, collaborating with other professionals, users, and families, and considering individual behaviour in the light of the relationships around the person. Enhanced communication, collaboration, targeted training, and personal-relational development may improve the quality of care and work experience.

Complexity in coordinated care (26) and organisations (57) is especially interesting. For example, Utley-Smith et al. (2009) refer to previous work on complexity (Cillers, 1998; Stacy, 1996) and to Bronfenbrenner's (1977) social ecological model to perform a comprehensive micro, meso, and macro-analysis of a nursing home. They show how an organisation can be understood and managed as a complex system featuring many elements and relationships, and built on constant information exchange and diversity among its members. They highlight nonlinear processes and feedback loops, relationships with the environment, and the cumulative cascade effects on the whole system triggered by small interactions at a local level. This knowledge can enhance the organisation's capacity for self-regulation and more effective strategies and behaviours.

For a formal caregiver, job satisfaction depends on the quality of the workplace atmosphere, the effective communication with users and families, and the possibility to know and transform one's own presuppositions and limits. Well-being is an eco-systemic process, not only individual. Research shows that coordinated or integrated care, a

longstanding policy concern (World Health Organization, 2002), is still a big challenge for professionals (Bishop & Waring, 2019).

Technology-mediated care as an educational process

A body of 13 papers concerned technology-mediated care, namely the caring processes that incorporate technology as a tool and/or an environment. We identified three topics:

1. Top-down versus bottom-up approaches: the former concern other-directed care, i.e. using technology for compensatory (7, 8) or activating (15, 18, 28) actions; the latter entails self-directed care and personal agency (17, 55). Compensatory strategies may adopt technology to guarantee proper medication administration and communication between informal and formal caregivers (32), or cognitive stimuli through robots (21), immersive virtual reality, and videoconferencing (8). Bottom-up approaches, far less represented in this literature, involved the study of how older people use technology in self-directed ways, for example acting as 'digital caregivers' when using social media to take care of others and themselves (17), or to cope with life transitions maintaining relationships, interests, and managing daily tasks (55).
2. Affordances, users, and systems are crucial aspects in designing and testing technological infrastructures and digital tools. Affordances and design characteristics can promote or hinder certain actions (Evans et al., 2017). Older adults can be involved in co-design to promote more meaningful experiences with technology. Several actors, such as designers, family caregivers, IT providers, health-care professionals, are called to offer insights to make technology-mediated care more significant and effective, and to educate older people using such technology (7, 15, 18, 21, 34, 42).
3. Discourses of technology-mediated care: although only two papers (21, 53) made specific reference to the macro system, the examined literature reflects specific discourses of a neoliberal cultural milieu. Hsu et al. (2020) explain how the development of aged-care robots in Japan, imbued with a tendency to frame ageing as an urgent crisis and promoting stereotypes on older adults as physically and mentally frail, justifies investment in robotic solutions based on paternalism and a technocentric epistemology. Similarly, Ganyo et al. (2011) raise ethical issues on using fall detectors that reinforces a broader culture of surveillance; it may hinder the autonomy and privacy of older people for the purpose of reducing public expenditures.

These topics illuminate a range of issues related to learning. Firstly, the diversity of experiences and uses of technology by older adults (Waycott et al., 2022). Then, the support to active ageing through online physical activity and the promotion of health and digital literacy (Ottoboni et al., 2019). Technologies can be interpreted as useful tools to guarantee therapeutic alignment and foster collaborative care, but also as learning environments. Berry et al. (2021) explored how different interactive tools can support shared reflexivity between patients and healthcare providers about health issues and personal values. For example, My List, a questionnaire filled by the patient in preparation for an upcoming visit, connects self-care duties, health indicators, and personal values. Older adults testing this prototype defined it as thought provoking. Another app, Time Machine, invites patients to evaluate past and future changes in their system of beliefs concerning health. Interestingly, when reflecting on the future, the participants expressed

positive views and transformative reflections on prospective changes in their frameworks of meaning and courses of action concerning their healthcare.

Bottom-up approaches, as said, are not much explored in our corpus of literature. Using a feminist framework, Brewer et al. (2021) show that older adults act as online caregivers, challenging the dominant idea that portraits them as passive users of social media and recipients of care. 'Digital caregivers' use social media to care for others and for themselves. Technology can help to cope with life transitions, maintain relationships and manage daily tasks, showing that older adults prefer those technologies that promote social interactions (Salovaara et al., 2010). So, when people appropriate technology for their own satisfaction, caring and learning are self-directed, going beyond the mere healthcare purpose.

Online Patient Education can be effective (Win et al., 2016) when offering individualised contents, interactive features, user-friendly texts and graphics, and navigational instructions. In evaluating mobile health apps for women considering prevention or treatment for osteoporosis, Kirkscey (2021) underscores the complex relationship between different stakeholders: users, caregivers, physicians, and IT coordinators. However, considering all the several actors in the development of technology for aged care is not always a given, as pointed out by Hsu et al. (2020), whose interviews with technology developers reveal that design is *for* and not *with* older people, seen as passive users and recipients of care. On a different note, Goumopoulos et al. (2017) show interdependence in their evaluation of the Senior App Suite, a mobile app for older people including services such as social networks, emergency detection, and wellbeing promotion; here, encouragement from family members and caregivers is deemed essential by older adults to scaffold their own use of technology.

Technology-mediated care is destined to grow, but it needs to be reconceptualised to acknowledge that 'technology is more than a tool of health care. […] is inseparable from care and humanity and is a significant driver that will shape our understanding of these concepts' (Archibald & Barnard, 2018, p. 2474). The pervasiveness of technology requires an approach to care as a more-than-human matter, a set of 'embodied and interembodied practices that bring together people and other living organisms with spaces and things in ways that seek to contribute to their flourishing. […] a dynamic sociomaterial assemblage of humans and nonhumans' (Hjorth & Lupton, p. 585). Also, matters concerning the digital divide, access, and inequalities among older technology users need to be further addressed to better ground technology-mediated care to situated lived experiences.

As a matter of fact, technology-mediated care is a cross-cutting, relational, and complex topic. These papers show concern for the informal and formal systems (7, 8, 15, 17, 18, 32, 42), but only two of them address the macro-level (21, 53). Complexity theory is only referred to in one paper (18), multifactoriality in another one (15), so the majority use complexity as a synonym for 'difficult'. A comprehensive critical framework could bring to a deeper understanding of the lights and shadows of technology-mediated care in ageing.

In this line, it is worth stressing the different learning experiences and representations of older adults promoted by technology. As recipients of care, users can express differential degrees of agency in deciding whether and how to use technology. The top-down approach forces them to interact with technology in a way that confirms the construction of ageing as a problem to be controlled. However, recognizing users as active agents of (self)care, who should know what is relevant for them and use technology to achieve their goals, may be more effective, in the long term, to sustain wellbeing, cope with life transitions, and build meaningful transformations.

Older adults are at risk of normative and paternalistic design and use of technological solutions. Their voices need to be taken into consideration in every aspect of technology-mediated care: design, evaluation, implementation, and use. Research shows that many significant people have a role to play in this process, and technology can work as a mediator and collective learning environment where older adults and other subjects can express themselves, learn, and explore possibilities. This would be a step beyond the deficit narrative that fuels the dominant portrayal of the ageing person as an impaired patient, and the individualistic epistemology isolating them from their systems.

Conclusions: Multiplying and connecting learning dimensions

> When someone says, 'It's complex. It's very complex!,' the word *complex d*oes not constitute an explanation, but rather indicates the difficulty in explaining. The word serves to designate something we really can't explain, but that we shall call 'complex'. For this reason, if there really is a complex form of thinking, it won't be capable of opening all doors (like those keys that open safes and cars). It will, on the contrary, be a thinking wherein difficulty is forever present. (Morin, 2008, p. 84)

Our critical literature review helped us to name relevant actors, contexts, and issues focused by interdisciplinary research on ageing that is concerned with complexity. Morin invites us to embrace complexity and go beyond a mere declaration of difficulty to gain a holistic understanding of the issues at hand. Interdisciplinarity, interprofessional dialogue, and interactions among many actors and organisations, and with the material environment, are structural factors in the process of learning about ageing, and the complexity framework is helpful in connecting different theories, disciplines, and perspectives, offering a way to overcome rigid boundaries between sectors.

Learning is a necessity for people who are ageing (all of us, indeed) as well as for their partners, families, formal and informal caregivers, communities, media, and the larger systems in a more-than-human world (Ferrante, 2017; Ferrante & Palmieri, 2015). The co-evolution of all these networks and relationships brings about transformations, not least transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991). A critical perspective alerts us on the risks of oversimplification and social injustice that increase when some variables, voices, or stories are neglected.

Post-capitalist economies are facing rapid and disruptive changes due to longevity, but not much attention is paid to investigate what kind of learning and education are required to cope with it. We contend that learning is a systemic process: we learn from each other, the systems where we belong teach – directly and indirectly - how we are expected to perform and narrate (our) later life, social roles, constraints and possibilities. Learning and transformation are not always positive, in this regard. The dominant discourse on ageing in the welfare system – or what remains of it - is based on cost assessment and solutions to simplified problems. We suggest that the theory of complexity can be used to develop new ideas and actions to enhance eco-systemic well-being and social justice for the most vulnerable individuals, groups, and communities. Complexity interconnects, as we have seen, health, lifestyle, socio-relational dynamics, care provision, economic, social and cultural capital, biographies, education, and media usage. It challenges causal linear thinking (Trompette et al., 2020). In times of uncertainty and unpredictability, respecting the systems' capacity for self-organisation works better than rigid regulations and protocols. Guidance and standards should not hinder, but enhance the situated capacity of adaptation and calibration at the local level.

Our literature review is focused on care, since health and a relative loss of autonomy can become fundamental aspects of identity in later life. It may be a bias, that narrows

down the complex identity of an older adult to medical problems. The number of healthy, active, and autonomous people over 65 is increasing, and care may not be perceived as an issue. However, many older adults tend to avoid the feelings of vulnerability related to ageing, and accept the need of others. Here, we tried to show that ageing people behave in relation to their belief systems as members of collectives, participating in the co-construction of social representations, and building scripts, coping strategies, and decision-making in relation to the context. New ongoing identities are shaped by meaningful relationships with significant others, media, and cultures, that may nurture emancipating or oppressive effects. Hence, our point is to invite researchers in older adults' learning to take a distance from dominant individualism to investigate these environmental complex dimensions.

Several aspects are worth of further inquiry: the (de)construction of representations and beliefs about ageing and the risks of ageism; the capacity of families and communities to cope with emerging needs and the burden of care; the resources to support learning about ageing, for older as well as younger learners; a better understanding of favourable trajectories and transitions, seen as circular and oscillating processes instead of linear or cumulative paths.

Complexity theory offers a comprehensive and effective representation of the learning context of ageing that embraces self-organisation and interdependence at a micro, meso, and macro-level. The 'dynamic elements of context play a powerful role in shaping participants' capacity and potential to respond' (May et al., 2016, p. 3). We have argued that conventional thinking oversimplifies complex issues by isolating variables and individuals. Intervention, education, and research driven by causal linearity and binary thinking separate health and meaning (another version of the body-mind dualism), intervention and context, programs and beneficiaries, national policies and local communities. In the following step of our study, we intend to implement and test these ideas in meeting older people, informal and formal caregivers, decision-makers, and communities, to build a thick representation of later life as a co-evolutionary process entrenched within the context, landscapes, and lifescapes of people (Formenti et al., 2014).

Declaration of conflicting interests

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

Funding

This publication is part of the research program Age-It which has received funding from the MUR – M4C2 1.3 of PNRR funded by the European Union - NextGenerationEU (Grant agreement no. PE0000015). The content of this paper represents the views of the authors only and their sole responsibility; it cannot be considered to reflect the views of the European Commission and/or the MUR. The European Commission and the MUR do not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.

References

Alhadeff-Jones, M. (2009). Revisiting educational research through Morin's paradigm of complexity. *Complicity: An International Journal of Complexity and Education*, *6*(1), 61-70. https://doi.org/10.29173/cmplct8807

Archibald, M. M., & Barnard, A. (2018). Futurism in nursing: Technology, robotics and the fundamentals of care. *Journal of Clinical Nursing, 27*(11-12), 2473-2480. https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.14081

Axelrod, R., & Cohen, M. D. (2000). *Harnessing complexity: Organizational implications of a scientific frontier*. Basic Books.

Berg, C. A., & Upchurch, R. (2007). A developmental-contextual model of couples coping with chronic illness across the adult life span. *Psychological Bulletin*, *133*(6), 920-954. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.133.6.920

Berry, A. B., Lim, C. Y., Liang, C. A., Hartzler, A. L., Hirsch, T., Ferguson, D. M., Bermet, Z.A. & Ralston, J. D. (2021). Supporting collaborative reflection on personal values and health. In J. Nichols (Ed.), *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer interaction, 5*(CSCW2), 1-39. https://doi.org/10.1145/3476040

Bishop, S. & Waring, J. (2019). From boundary object to boundary subject; the role of the patient in coordination across complex systems of care during hospital discharge. *Social Science & Medicine*, *235*, 112370. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2019.112370

Bower, K. L., Kemp, C. L., Burgess, E. O., & Atkinson, J. L. (2020). Complexity of care: Stressors and strengths among low-income mother-daughter dyads. *Journal of Women & Aging, 32*(2), 131-148. https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2018.1537689

Braithwaite, J., Churruca, K., Ellis, L. A., Long, J., Clay-Williams, R., Damen, N., Herkes, J., Pomare, C., & Ludlow, K. (2017). *Complexity science in healthcare – Aspirations, approaches, applications and accomplishments: a white paper*. Australian Institute of Health Innovation, Macquarie University.

Brewer, R. N., Schoenebeck, S., Lee, K., & Suryadevara, H. (2021). Challenging passive social media use: Older adults as caregivers online. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction, 5*(CSCW1), 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1145/3449197

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American psychologist*, *32*(7), 513-531. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0003-066X.32.7.513

Cillers, P. (1998). *Complexity and postmodernism: Understanding complex adaptive systems*. Routledge.

Cornish, F., Gillespie, A., & Zittoun, T. (2013). Collaborative analysis of qualitative data. In U. Flick (Ed.), *Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* (pp. 79-93). Sage.

Daley, B. J. (2004, September 14-17). *Using concept maps in qualitative research* [Paper presentation]. CMC 2004 - First International Conference on Concept Mapping, Pamplona, Spain.

Evans, S. K., Pearce, K. E., Vitak, J., & Treem, J. W. (2017). Explicating affordances: A conceptual framework for understanding affordances in communication research. *Journal of computer-mediated communication*, *22*(1), 35-52. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12180

Fenwick, T. (2003). Reclaiming and re-embodying experiential learning through complexity science. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, *35*(2), 123-141. https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2003.11661478

Fenwick, T. (2016). Complexity science and professional learning for collaboration: a critical reconsideration of possibilities and limitations. *Journal of Education and Work, 25*(1), 141-162. https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2012.644911

Ferrante, A. (2017). *Che cos'è un dispositivo pedagogico?* [What is a pedagogical device?]. Franco Angeli.

Ferrante, A., & Palmieri, C. (2015). Aver cura del divenire. Verso un milieu educativo post-umanista. [Looking after the becoming. Towards a post-humanist educational milieu]. *MeTis-Mondi educativi. Temi, indagini, suggestioni, 5*(1), 248-260. https://dx.doi.org/DOI:%2010.12897/01.00127

von Foerster, H. (1982). *Observing systems*. Intersystems Publications.

von Foerster, H. (1984). On constructing a reality. In P. Watzlawick (Ed.), *The Invented reality: how do we know what we believe we know? Contributions to constructivism* (pp. 41-61). Norton & Company. (Original work published 1973)

Formenti, L. (2018). Complexity, adult biographies and co-operative transformation. In M. Milana, S. Webb, J. Holford, R. Waller & P. Jarvis (Eds.), *The Palgrave international handbook on adult and lifelong education and learning* (pp. 191-209). Palgrave.

Formenti, L. (2019). Perspectives on context: metaphors, epistemologies, and theoretical definitions. In B. Merrill, A. Nizinska, A. Galimberti, J. Eneau, E. Sanojca & S. Bezzari (Eds.), *Exploring learning contexts: Implications for access, learning careers and identities* (pp. 45-58). Université Rennes 2.

Formenti, L., & West, L. (2018). *Transforming perspectives in lifelong learning and adult education: A dialogue.* Springer.

Formenti, L., West, L., & Horsdal, M. (2014). *Embodied narratives. Connecting stories, bodies, cultures and ecologies.* University Press of Southern Denmark.

Formosa, M. (2012). Critical geragogy. Situating theory in practice. *Journal of Contemporary Educational Studies*, *5*(2012), 36-54.
Ganyo, M., Dunn, M., & Hope, T. (2011). Ethical issues in the use of fall detectors. *Ageing & Society, 31*(8), 1350-1367. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X10001443
Golding, B., Brown, M., & Foley, A. (2009). Informal learning: a discussion around defining and researching its breadth and importance. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 49*(1), 35-56. https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/ielapa.835831545257705
Goumopoulos, C., Papa, I., & Stavrianos, A. (2017). Development and evaluation of a mobile application suite for enhancing the social inclusion and well-being of seniors. *Informatics, 4*(3), 1-27. https://doi.org/10.3390/informatics4030015
Grant, M. J., & Booth, A. (2009). A typology of reviews: an analysis of 14 review types and associated methodologies. *Health Information & Libraries Journal, 26*(2), 91-108. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-1842.2009.00848.x
Greenhalgh, T., & Papoutsi, C. (2018). Studying complexity in health services research: desperately seeking an overdue paradigm shift. *BMC medicine*, 16, Article 95, 1-6. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-018-1089-4
Griffore, R. J. (2019). Capital and Value in Late Adulthood. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, *48*(2), 138-148. https://doi.org/10.1111/fcsr.12334
Hagedoorn, E. I., Paans, W., van der Schans, C. P., Jaarsma, T., Luttik, M. L. A., & Keers, J. C. (2021). Family caregivers' perceived level of collaboration with hospital nurses: A cross-sectional study. *Journal of nursing management, 29*(5), 1064-1072. https://doi.org/10.1111/jonm.13244
Hjorth, L., & Lupton, D. (2021). Digitised caring intimacies: more-than-human intergenerational care in Japan. *International Journal of Cultural Studies, 24*(4), 584-602. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877920927427
Hsu, E. L., Elliott, A., Ishii, Y., Sawai, A., & Katagiri, M. (2020). The development of aged care robots in Japan as a varied process. *Technology in Society, 63*, 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2020.101366
Hynes, W., Lees, M., & Müller, J. M. (Eds.). (2020). *Systemic Thinking for Policy Making. The Potential of Systems Analysis for Addressing Global Policy Challenges in the 21st Century.* OECD Publishing.
Keating, N. (2022) A research framework for the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030). *European Journal of Ageing, 19*, 775-787. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10433-021-00679-7
Kirkscey, R. (2021). mHealth apps for older adults: a method for development and user experience design evaluation. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication, 51*(2), 199-217. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047281620907939
Majón-Valpuesta, D., Pérez-Salanova, M., Ramos, P., & Haye, A. (2022). "It's impossible for them to understand me 'cause I haven't said a word": how women baby boomers shape social participation spaces in old age. *Journal of Women and Aging*, *34*(3), 277-293. https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2021.1915684
May, C. R., Johnson, M., & Finch, T. (2016). Implementation, context and complexity. *Implementation Science, 11*(141), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-016-0506-3
Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. Jossey-Bass.
Moher, D., Liberati, A., Tetzlaff, J., & Altman, D. G., The PRISMA Group. (2009). Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses: The PRISMA Statement. *PLoS Med*, *6*(7), 1-6. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000097
Morin, E. (2008). *On complexity* (R. Postel, Trans.). Hampton Press.
Novak, J. D., & Gowin, D. B. (1984). *Learning how to learn*. Cambridge University Press.
Nowak, A., & Hubbard, R. E. (2009). Falls and frailty: lessons from complex systems. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, *102*(3), 98-102. https://doi.org/10.1258/jrsm.2009.080274
Ottoboni, G., Gallelli, T., Mariani, E., Rebecca Soluri, V., Nunziata, S., Tessari, A., Savary, J.P., & Chattat, R. (2019). Remote home physical training for seniors: Guidelines from the AAL-supported MOTION project. *European Journal of Ageing, 16*, 25-37. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10433-018-0477-0
Pereira, F., Bieri, M., del Rio Carral, M., Martins, M. M., & Verloo, H. (2022). Collaborative medication management for older adults after hospital discharge: a qualitative descriptive study. *BMC nursing, 21*(1), Article 284, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12912-022-01061-3
Roux, P., Verloo, H., Santiago-Delefosse, M., & Pereira, F. (2019). The spatial dimensions of medication management by home-dwelling older adults after hospital discharge. *Health & place*, *60*, Article 102230. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2019.102230

Salovaara, A., Lehmuskallio, A., Hedman, L., Valkonen, P., & Näsänen, J. (2010). Information technologies and transitions in the lives of 55–65-year-olds: The case of colliding life interests. *International journal of human-computer studies*, *68*(11), 803-821. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2010.06.007

Schusselé Filliettaz, S., Moiroux, S., Marchand, G., Gilles, I., & Peytremann-Bridevaux, I. (2021). Realist evaluation of a pilot intervention implementing interprofessional and interinstitutional processes for transitional care. *Home Health Care Services Quarterly, 40*(4), 302-323. https://doi.org/10.1080/01621424.2021.1989356

Smith-Carrier, T., & Neysmith, S. (2014). Analyzing the Interprofessional Working of a Home-Based Primary Care Team. *Canadian Journal on Aging, 33*(3), 271-284. https://doi.org/10.1017/S071498081400021X

Stacy, R. (1996). *Complexity and creativity in organizations*. Berrett Koehler.

Trompette, J., Kivits, J., Minary, L., & Alla, F. (2020). Dimensions of the complexity of health interventions: What are we talking about? A review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *17*(9), Article 3069. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17093069

Utley-Smith, Q., Colón-Emeric, C. S., Lekan-Rutledge, D., Ammarell, N., Bailey, D., Corazzini, K., Piven, M.L, & Anderson, R. A. (2009). Staff perceptions of staff-family interactions in nursing homes. *Journal of Aging Studies, 23*(3), 168-177. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2007.11.003

Vaismoradi, M., Turunen, H., & Bondas, T. (2013). Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study. *Nursing & Health Sciences*, *15*(3), 398-405. https://doi.org/10.1111/nhs.12048

Waycott, J., Zhao, W., Kelly, R. M., & Robertson, E. (2022). Technology-mediated enrichment in aged care: survey and interview study. *JMIR Aging, 5*(2), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.2196/31162

Win, K. T., Hassan, N. M., Oinas-Kukkonen, H., & Probst, Y. (2016). Online patient education for chronic disease management: consumer perspectives. *Journal of Medical Systems*, *40*, Article 88, 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10916-016-0438-0

Withnall, A. (2009). *Improving learning in later life*. Routledge.

Withnall, A. (2011). Lifelong or longlife? Learning in the later years. In D. N. Aspin, J. Chapman, K. Evans, & R. Bagnall (Eds.), *Second international handbook of lifelong learning* (pp. 649-664). Springer.

World Health Organization. (2002). *Active ageing: A policy framework*. WHO.

Appendix

	Full reference	Method	Geography	Theme	Systemic level	Complexity	Theoretical Depth
1	Johansson, C., Lindberg, D., Morell, I. A., & Gustafsson, L. K. (2022). Swedish experts' understanding of active aging from a culturally sensitive perspective–a Delphi study of organizational implementation thresholds and ways of development. *Frontiers in Sociology, 7*, 1-15.	Mixed	Sweden	4	Micro, Meso, Macro	2	3
2	Bowley, J. J., Faulkner, K., Finch, J., Gavaghan, B., & Foster, M. (2022). Understanding the Experiences of Rural-and Remote-Living Patients Accessing Sub-Acute Care in Queensland: A Qualitative Descriptive Analysis. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare*, *15,* 2945-2955.	Qual	Australia	1	Micro, Meso	1	1
3	Pereira, F., Bieri, M., del Rio Carral, M., Martins, M. M., & Verloo, H. (2022). Collaborative medication management for older adults after hospital discharge: a qualitative descriptive study. *BMC nursing, 21*(1), 1-16.	Qual	Switzerland	1, 2	Micro	2	1
4	Bonus, C. G., Northall, T., Hatcher, D., & Montayre, J. (2022). Experiences of perioperative care among ethnically diverse older adult patients: An integrative review. *Collegian, 29*(6), 911-923.	Lit rev	Australia	2	Micro, Meso, Macro	1	1
5	André, B., Jacobsen, F. F., & Haugan, G. (2022). How is leadership experienced in joy-of-life-nursing-homes compared to ordinary nursing homes: a qualitative study. *BMC Nursing, 21*(1), 1-9.	Qual	Norway	2	Micro, Meso	2	3
6	Keating, N. (2022). A research framework for the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030). *European Journal of Ageing, 19*(3), 775-787.	Theor	United Kingdom	1, 2, 4	Micro, Meso, Macro	2	3
7	Beeber, A. S., Hoben, M., Leeman, J., Palmertree, S., Kistler, C. E., Ottosen, T., ... & Anderson, R. A. (2022). Developing a toolkit to improve resident and family engagement in the safety of assisted living: Engage—A stakeholder-engaged research protocol. *Research in Nursing & Health, 45*(4), 413-423.	Qual	United States	1, 2, 3	Micro, Meso	1	2
8	Waycott, J., Zhao, W., Kelly, R. M., & Robertson, E. (2022). Technology-mediated enrichment in aged care: survey and interview study. *JMIR Aging, 5*(2), 1-16.	Mixed	Australia	2, 3	Micro, Meso	1	1
9	Kokorelias, K. M., Singh, H., Posa, S., & Hitzig, S. L. (2023). Understanding the goals of older adults with complex care needs, their family caregivers and their care providers enrolled in a patient navigation program. *Journal of Applied Gerontology, 42*(5), 862-870.	Qual	Canada	1, 2	Micro, Meso	2	1
10	Fudge, N., & Swinglehurst, D. (2022). Keeping in balance on the multimorbidity tightrope: A narrative analysis of older patients' experiences of living with and managing multimorbidity. *Social Science & Medicine*, *292*, 1-9.	Qual	United Kingdom	2	Micro	2	3
11	Hamiduzzaman, M., Torres, S., Fletcher, A., Islam, M. R., Siddiquee, N. A., & Greenhill, J. (2022). Aging, care and dependency in multimorbidity: how do relationships affect older Bangladeshi women's use of homecare and health services? *Journal of Women & Aging, 34*(6), 731-744.	Qual	Bangladesh	1, 2	Micro, Meso, Macro	2	3
12	Majón-Valpuesta, D., Pérez-Salanova, M., Ramos, P., & Haye, A. (2022). "It's impossible for them to understand me 'cause I haven't said a word": how women baby boomers shape social participation spaces in old age. *Journal of Women & Aging, 34*(3), 277-293.	Qual	Spain	4	Micro, Meso, Macro	2	3
13	Suarez Vazquez, A., Suárez Álvarez, L., & Del Rio Lanza, A. B. (2022). Communicating with companions. The impact of companion empowerment and companion literacy on the well-being of elderly patients. *Health Communication, 37*(5), 648-655.	Quan	Spain	1	Micro, Meso, Macro	2	3
14	Río-Lanza, A. B. D., Suárez-Álvarez, L., & Suárez-Vázquez, A. (2021). Accompanying patients aged 65 or over: how companions' health literacy affects value co-creation during medical encounters. *Journal of Aging and Health, 33*(10), 953-964.	Quan	Spain	1, 2	Meso	2	1
15	Berry, A. B., Lim, C. Y., Liang, C. A., Hartzler, A. L., Hirsch, T., Ferguson, D. M., Bermet, Z.A. & Ralston, J. D. (2021). Supporting collaborative reflection on personal values and health. *Proceedings of the ACM on human-computer interaction, 5*(CSCW2), 1-39.	Qual	United States	2, 3	Micro, Meso	2	3
16	Hagedoorn, E. I., Paans, W., van der Schans, C. P., Jaarsma, T., Luttik, M. L. A., & Keers, J. C. (2021). Family caregivers' perceived level of collaboration with hospital nurses: A cross-sectional study. Journal of nursing management, 29(5), 1064-1072.	Quan	Netherlands	1, 2	Meso	1	1
17	Brewer, R. N., Schoenebeck, S., Lee, K., & Suryadevara, H. (2021). Challenging passive social media use: Older adults as caregivers online. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction, 5*(CSCW1), 1-20.	Mixed	United States	1, 3	Micro, Meso	1	1
18	Kirkscey, R. (2021). mHealth apps for older adults: a method for development and user experience design evaluation. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication, 51*(2), 199-217.	Qual	United States	3	Micro, Meso	3	2

19	Schusselé Filliettaz, S., Moiroux, S., Marchand, G., Gilles, I., & Peytremann-Bridevaux, I. (2021). Realist evaluation of a pilot intervention implementing interprofessional and interinstitutional processes for transitional care. *Home Health Care Services Quarterly, 40*(4), 302-323.	Qual	Switzerland	2	Micro, Meso	3	3
20	Kridahl, L., & Duvander, A. Z. (2021). Are mothers and daughters most important? How gender, childhood family dissolution and parents' current living arrangements affect the personal care of parents. *Social Sciences, 10*(5), 1-20.	Quan	Sweden	1	Meso, Macro	2	3
21	Hsu, E. L., Elliott, A., Ishii, Y., Sawai, A., & Katagiri, M. (2020). The development of aged care robots in Japan as a varied process. *Technology in Society, 63*, 1-9.	Qual	Japan	3	Micro, Macro	1	2
22	Bower, K. L., Kemp, C. L., Burgess, E. O., & Atkinson, J. L. (2020). Complexity of care: Stressors and strengths among low-income mother-daughter dyads. *Journal of Women & Aging, 32*(2), 131-148.	Qual	United States	1	Micro, Meso, Macro	2	3
23	Altomonte, G. (2020). Exploiting ambiguity: A moral polysemy approach to variation in economic practices. *American Sociological Review, 85*(1), 76-105.	Qual	United States	2, 4	Micro, Meso, Macro	2	3
24	Griffore, R. J. (2019). Capital and value in late adulthood. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal, 48*(2), 138-148.	Theor	United States	1, 2, 4	Micro, Meso, Macro	3	3
25	Roux, P., Verloo, H., Santiago-Delefosse, M., & Pereira, F. (2019). The spatial dimensions of medication management by home-dwelling older adults after hospital discharge. *Health & Place, 60*, 1-9.	Qual	Switzerland	1, 2	Micro, Meso	1	3
26	Bishop, S., & Waring, J. (2019). From boundary object to boundary subject; the role of the patient in coordination across complex systems of care during hospital discharge. *Social Science & Medicine, 235*, 1-9.	Qual	United Kingdom	1, 2	Micro, Meso	3	3
27	Keating, N., Eales, J., Funk, L., Fast, J., & Min, J. (2019). Life course trajectories of family care. *International Journal of Care and Caring, 3*(2), 147-163.	Theor	Canada, South Africa, South Korea	1, 4	Micro, Meso, Macro	1	3
28	Ottoboni, G., Gallelli, T., Mariani, E., Rebecca Soluri, V., Nunziata, S., Tessari, A., Savary, J.P. & Chattat, R. (2019). Remote home physical training for seniors: Guidelines from the AAL-supported MOTION project. *European Journal of Ageing, 16*, 25-37.	Qual	Italy	3	Micro, Meso	1	2
29	Lane, P., & Smith, D. (2018). Culture, ageing and the construction of pain. *Geriatrics, 3*(3), 1-13.	Lit review	United Kingdom	4	Macro	2	3
30	Mickelson, R. S., & Holden, R. J. (2018). Medication adherence: staying within the boundaries of safety. *Ergonomics, 61*(1), 82-103.	Mixed	United States	1, 2	Micro	1	1
31	Bristol, A. A., Crist, J. D., Phillips, L. R., Shea, K. D., & Lacasse, C. (2018). Family caregivers' experiences of Within-Hospital handoffs for older adults in acute care. Journal of nursing care quality, *33*(4), 368-374.	Qual	United States	1, 2	Micro, Meso	1	1
32	Sheehan, O. C., Kharrazi, H., Carl, K. J., Leff, B., Wolff, J. L., Roth, D. L., ... & Boyd, C. M. (2018). Helping older adults improve their medication experience (HOME) by addressing medication regimen complexity in home healthcare. *Home Healthcare Now, 36*(1), 1-14.	Quan	United States	1, 2, 3	Micro, Meso	1	1
33	Werner, N. E., Malkana, S., Gurses, A. P., Leff, B., & Arbaje, A. I. (2017). Toward a process-level view of distributed healthcare tasks: medication management as a case study. *Applied Ergonomics, 65*, 255-268.	Qual	Netherlands	1, 2	Micro, Meso	2	2
34	Goumopoulos, C., Papa, I., & Stavrianos, A. (2017). Development and evaluation of a mobile application suite for enhancing the social inclusion and well-being of seniors. *Informatics, 4*(3), 1-27.	Mixed	Greece	3	Micro	1	1
35	Bacsu, J., Abonyi, S., Viger, M., Morgan, D., Johnson, S., & Jeffery, B. (2017). Examining rural older adults' perceptions of cognitive health. *Canadian Journal on Aging/La Revue canadienne du vieillissement, 36*(3), 318-327.	Qual	Canada	4	Micro, Meso	2	3
36	Hagedoorn, E. I., Paans, W., Jaarsma, T., Keers, J. C., van der Schans, C., & Luttik, M. L. (2017). Aspects of family caregiving as addressed in planned discussions between nurses, patients with chronic diseases and family caregivers: a qualitative content analysis. *BMC Nursing, 16*(1), 1-10.	Qual	Netherlands	1, 2	Micro	1	1
37	Gustavson, A. M., Jones, J., Morrow, K. J., & Stevens-Lapsley, J. E. (2017). Preparing for the future of post–acute care: A metasynthesis of qualitative studies. *Home Health Care Management & Practice, 29*(2), 70-80.	Lit review	United States	4	Meso, Macro	2	3
38	Ben-Harush, A., Shiovitz-Ezra, S., Doron, I., Alon, S., Leibovitz, A., Golander, H., ... & Ayalon, L. (2017). Ageism among physicians, nurses, and social workers: Findings from a qualitative study. *European Journal Of Ageing, 14*, 39-48.	Qual	Israel	2, 4	Micro	2	2
39	Roos, V., Silvestre, S., & De Jager, T. (2017). Intergenerational care perceptions of older women and middle adolescents in a resource-constrained community in South Africa. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, *60*(2), 104-119.	Qual	South Africa	4	Micro, Meso, Macro	1	2
40	Morrow, E. M., & Nicholson, C. (2016). Carer engagement in the hospital care of older people: an integrative literature review. *International Journal of Older People Nursing, 11*(4), 298-314.	Lit review	United Kingdom	1, 2	Macro	1	3

41	O'Connor, M., Moriarty, H., Madden-Baer, R., & Bowles, K. H. (2016). Identifying critical factors in determining discharge readiness from skilled home health: An interprofessional perspective. *Research in Gerontological Nursing, 9*(6), 269-277	Qual	United States	1, 2	Micro, Meso	1	2
42	Win, K. T., Hassan, N. M., Oinas-Kukkonen, H., & Probst, Y. (2016). Online patient education for chronic disease management: consumer perspectives. *Journal of Medical Systems*, *40*, 1-13.	Quan	Australia	1, 3	Micro, Meso	1	1
43	Domínguez-Guedea, M. T., & Garcia, A. O. (2015). Sociocultural and familial influences on the well-being of mexican older adults' family caregivers. *Research in Gerontological Nursing, 8*(4), 188-196.	Quan	Mexico	1	Micro, Meso, Macro	2	2
44	Smith-Carrier, T., & Neysmith, S. (2014). Analyzing the interprofessional working of a home-based primary care team. *Canadian Journal on Aging/La Revue canadienne du vieillissement, 33*(3), 271-284.	Case study	Canada	2	Micro, Meso	2	3
45	Riva, G., Gaggioli, A., Villani, D., Cipresso, P., Repetto, C., Serino, S., Triberti, S., Brivio, E., Galimberti, C., & Graffigna, G. (2014). Positive Technology for Healthy Living and Active Ageing. *Studies in Health Technology and Informatics, 203*, 44-56.	Theor	Italy	3	Micro, Meso	1	3
46	Storm, M., Siemsen, I. M. D., Laugaland, K., Dyrstad, D. N., & Aase, K. (2014). Quality in transitional care of the elderly: Key challenges and relevant improvement measures. *International Journal Of Integrated Care, 14,* 1-15.	Case study	Norway	1, 2	Meso	1	2
47	Walsh, K., & Shutes, I. (2013). Care relationships, quality of care and migrant workers caring for older people. *Ageing & Society, 33*(3), 393-420.	Mixed	Ireland, United Kingdom	2	Micro, Meso, Macro	2	3
48	Hobbs, A., & Alonzi, A. (2013). Mediation and family group conferences in adult safeguarding. *The Journal of Adult Protection, 15*(2), 69-84.	Lit review	United Kingdom	4	Meso	2	2
49	Viau-Guay, A., Bellemare, M., Feillou, I., Trudel, L., Desrosiers, J., & Robitaille, M. J. (2013). Person-centered care training in long-term care settings: usefulness and facility of transfer into practice. *Canadian Journal on Aging/La Revue canadienne du vieillissement, 32*(1), 57-72.	Qual	United Kingdom	1, 2	Micro, Meso	2	3
50	Bisogni, C. A., Jastran, M., Seligson, M., & Thompson, A. (2012). How people interpret healthy eating: contributions of qualitative research. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, 44*(4), 282-301.	Lit review	United States	4	Micro, Meso	2	3
51	Wall, J. C., & Spira, M. K. (2012). A conceptual framework for differential use of mediation and family therapy interventions with older adults and their families. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work, 55*(3), 282-297.	Qual	United States	1	Meso	1	2
52	Schroeder, B., MacDonald, J., & Shamian, J. (2012). Older workers with caregiving responsibilities: A Canadian perspective on corporate caring. *Ageing International, 37*, 39-56.	Theo	Canada	1, 4	Macro	1	1
53	Ganyo, M., Dunn, M., & Hope, T. (2011). Ethical issues in the use of fall detectors. *Ageing & Society, 31*(8), 1350-1367.	Theo	United States	3, 4	Meso, Macro	1	2
54	Even-Zohar, A. (2011). Intergenerational solidarity between adult grandchildren and their grandparents with different levels of functional ability. Journal of Intergenerational Relationships, *9*(2), 128-145.	Quan	Israel	1	//	1	1
55	Salovaara, A., Lehmuskallio, A., Hedman, L., Valkonen, P., & Näsänen, J. (2010). Information technologies and transitions in the lives of 55–65-year-olds: The case of colliding life interests. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies, 68*(11), 803-821.	Qual	Finland, Sweden	3	Micro	1	3
56	Connolly, M., Grimshaw, J., Dodd, M., Cawthorne, J., Hulme, T., Everitt, S., ... & Deaton, C. (2009). Systems and people under pressure: the discharge process in an acute hospital. *Journal of Clinical Nursing, 18*(4), 549-558.	Qual	United Kingdom	1, 2	Micro, Meso	2	1
57	Utley-Smith, Q., Colón-Emeric, C. S., Lekan-Rutledge, D., Ammarell, N., Bailey, D., Corazzini, K., Piven, M.L. & Anderson, R. A. (2009). Staff perceptions of staff-family interactions in nursing homes. *Journal of Aging Studies, 23*(3), 168-177.	Mixed	United States	1, 2	Micro, Meso	3	3
58	Clark, A. M., Reid, M. E., Morrison, C. E., Capewell, S., Murdoch, D. L., & McMurray, J. J. (2008). The complex nature of informal care in home-based heart failure management. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 61*(4), 373-383.	Qual	Scotland	1	Micro, Meso	1	1
59	Berg, C. A., & Upchurch, R. (2007). A developmental-contextual model of couples coping with chronic illness across the adult life span. *Psychological Bulletin, 133*(6), 920.	Lit review	United States	1	Micro, Meso, Macro	3	3
60	Tuckett, A. G. (2007). The meaning of nursing-home:'Waiting to go up to St. Peter, OK! Waiting house, sad but true'—An Australian perspective. *Journal of Aging Studies*, *21*(2), 119-133.	Qual	Australia	2	Micro, Meso	1	3
61	Williams, K. N. (2006). Improving outcomes of nursing home interactions. *Research in Nursing & Health, 29*(2), 121-133.	Qual	United States	2	Micro, Meso	1	2
62	Wodarski, J. S., & Williams-Hayes, M. M. (2003). Utilizing case management to maintain the elderly in the community. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, *39*(4), 19-38.	Theor	United States	4	Meso	1	1

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2025, pp. 97-114

Predicting drop-out during initial training among volunteer firefighters

Pauline Born
University of Bourgogne, France (pauline.born@u-bourgogne.fr)

Abstract

This article looks at the drop-out rate among volunteer firefighters during their initial training. It is based on data collected in France. It uses a mixed approach to identify profiles likely to leave their commitment quickly during initial training. Profile data from 330 individuals still in employment and 42 dropouts were used. The results show that women, individuals with prior knowledge of the environment, and city dwellers are more likely to drop out, while individuals from advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds will continue their involvement. Adjustments in communication, environmental management and mission specialisation could help retain volunteers and limit the risk of early drop-out. This study addresses a particularly important issue at a time when the recruitment of volunteer firefighters is posing significant challenges around the world.

Keywords: volunteer firefighters, commitment, initial training, dropouts

Introduction

The volunteer fire brigade remains largely unexplored in the field of education and training, despite the fact that it is used extensively in many countries to carry out emergency missions. The available literature raises two notable points. On the one hand, recent research into firefighter training has generally focused on the tools used, such as the work of Monteiro et al. (2021) and Wheeler et al. (2021), who have looked at the role

ISSN 2000-7426

© 2025 The author
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/
http://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.5221
www.rela.ep.liu.se

of virtual reality in developing skills for training this population. On the other hand, research into drop-out in continuing education is rare, whatever the environment studied, despite some interesting work published in recent years, such as that on drop-out in e-learning courses (Dirzyte et al., 2023).

Based on the French example, this article looks at the risk of dropping out of volunteer firefighter training, focusing on the first few years of commitment. Using a mixed approach, it seeks to identify the profiles most likely to end their involvement quickly, during their initial training. Official statistics and previous work (Pudal, 2011, 2016) show a certain homogeneity in the profiles of volunteer firefighters, with a majority of men, young, from working-class backgrounds and white. However, given the criteria to be met, almost anyone can sign up. At the same time, there is a high resignation rate during the first few years of service, which in France are mainly devoted to initial training. This training would therefore not enable certain profiles to be retained in the ranks, and these need to be identified. This research could provide new insights into the volunteer fire brigade population, one of the most important challenges of which is to build loyalty, particularly at a time when recruitment difficulties are high, both in France and internationally, such as in the United States and the United Kingdom.

After presenting the French research context, this article will propose a theoretical framework based on the special status of volunteers, on initial training in this activity and on dropping out of training. The research methodology will then be detailed and will present the data, the analyses carried out, the ethical framework of the research and the profile of the participants in the survey. The results will then be presented. They are based on binomial logistic regression. Finally, a discussion will look again at the risk of dropping out of the profession and the challenge of retaining the loyalty that lies behind the initial training of volunteer firefighters.

Context

Alongside their Danish and Finnish counterparts, French fire fighters have the widest range of duties and responsibilities (Chevreuil, 2010). French firefighters have to be multi-skilled, providing medical assistance in addition to dealing with fires. Rescuing victims and assisting people are their primary principal duties, accounting for 81% of all interventions (data from the Ministry of Interior for 2021).

In France, public policy on civil protection is a shared responsibility between the State and local authorities: the General Directorate for Civil Protection and Crisis Management administers it at national level, while the departmental fire and rescue services manage the bulk of the fire department at local level. Firefighters can be recruited from a number of different backgrounds, depending on whether they wish to make it their profession or a secondary activity: military (5% of the total number of firefighters); professionals, if they are recruited through a competitive examination (17% of the total number); voluntary, when they work in their spare time, alongside their main job or studies (78% of the total number). The volunteer system is highly developed in the country and is particularly important in recruitment in rural areas. Volunteer firefighters work in their spare time, alongside their main professional activity. To be eligible, volunteers must be between 16 and 55 years of age, have regular administrative status and meet medical and physical fitness requirements. Volunteers are assigned to the fire stations closest to their homes and receive regular training. Volunteers and professionals do the same work, provide the same service to the public and wear the same uniform. There is no particular sign to distinguish them during an intervention. Different ranks are awarded depending on the duties performed.

The fire station plays an important role in the social and fraternal ties that bind firefighters together. In addition to its functional role as a permanent operational facility and reserve of available resources, it is also a place where firefighters can meet up and socialise. They can share moments reserved for commitment (post-intervention debriefing, operational exercises, training, sports training) as well as time devoted more to relaxation through various social events. These special activities help to build the group cohesion that is essential to operational effectiveness. In addition, the fire station is open to society and is a place where new volunteer firefighters can be recruited.

The status of volunteer firefighter is governed by national legislation. However, the organisation of the fire and rescue services is entrusted to the départements (territorial collectivities) and may therefore vary slightly from one territory to another, insofar as they draw up their own guidelines in addition to national ones.

The status of volunteer fire fighters

The activity of a volunteer firefighter should be understood as an occupation rather than a profession (Meyer & Allen, 1993). French volunteer firefighters are neither members of a a charitable organisation nor employees. Charitable activities can be stopped by the individual at any time, whilst employment refers to an activity governed by a contract and carried out by an individual in exchange for remuneration. Volunteering is at the interface of the two. It constitutes a unique form of commitment that encompasses both disinterested aspects such as the underlying spirit of initiative, and elements specific to employment, such as remuneration (Chevrier & Dartiguenave, 2008). In this perspective, the collaboration between the volunteer firefighter and the organisation is intended to be selfless, but a strong connection nonetheless binds the two parties (Chevreuil, 2010). In France, volunteer firefighters are not remunerated, but rather compensated for the hours they spend on call-outs. They receive allowances of around €9 an hour for their shifts depending on their grade. Volunteer firefighters do not generally sign up for the remuneration, but for some the financial remuneration provides an essential additional income.

The voluntary fire service plays a central role. Although many countries use this type of system to carry out emergency missions, not all do so in similar proportions. In Europe alone there are major disparities.[1] In Germany, for example, 97% of firefighters are volunteers. Their allowance varies from one Land to another, but is generally lower than that of French firefighters at around €3.50 per hour. In Belgium, volunteer fire fighters account for only 63% of the workforce, but receive a higher allowance of around €11 an hour. In summary, the French volunteer firefighter is somewhere in between.

The French model is rather demanding of its volunteer firefighters, who must demonstrate their skills and availability to carry out all the missions entrusted to them. They must regularly be on call or on duty, which means that they must be physically present in the fire station, in the same way as a professional firefighter. On average, volunteer firefighters are responsible for 45% of night duty and 38% of day duty hours (data from the Ministry of Interior for 2021). This type of duty, which has developed considerably in recent years, has become necessary in order to supplement the ranks of professional firefighters at a lower cost, and to respond to the transformation of territories and society.

Commitment to initial training and professionalisation development

Training firefighters is essential to prepare them for the stressful and challenging emergency environment in which they will operate (Horn et al., 2019). When they sign up, volunteer firefighters generally do not have the necessary skills. They are therefore obliged to undergo initial training which contributes to the lifelong education (Billett, 2023) of individuals. However, they do not attend training purely out of obligation (Carré et al., 2024). They also engage in it to develop knowledge, to meet peers or to familiarise themselves with the environment (intrinsic motivations). Moreover, they are aware of the importance of training (Chevrier & Dartiguenave, 2008) and their motivation to get involved is strong, not least because of their choice of status, based on voluntary work (Curado et al., 2015).

In France, initial training is organised around national and departmental standards. It lasts around thirty days, can be spread over the first three years, and generally lasts at least a year. It is divided into five modules combining theory and practice, and corresponding to the different types of response encountered. Pending full validation, which enables all missions to be carried out, volunteer firefighters can take part in operations as and when they have assimilated the training modules required for a particular type of intervention.

Initial training is generally the first real immersion in the environment for volunteer fire fighters. In this sense, it is designed to support the process of professionalisation of this population: it enables the learner to develop skills and discover the commitment required, but it also offers a first clear image of the activity and opportunities for socialisation. The professionalisation of volunteers is part of a wider process of professionalisation of the fire service, based on the historical context of the activity, and is supported and encouraged by the authorities. The professionalisation of this population refers back to the work of McClelland (1990), who stresses the importance of historical and social conditions in the process of professionalisation. Since firefighting is organised by the state and local authorities, this is a case of ‘professionaliation from above’, in the words of McClelland (1990, p. 107). This type of professionalisation can be seen in other sectors, such as the police (Holdaway, 2017) and teachers (Buyruk, 2014).

Initial training is validated by participation in the various training modules. However, it also involves a significant investment in the fire station, particularly as it is organised and implemented over a long period of time. Firstly, the volunteer has to attend the fire station to develop the knowledge that is expected before the start of the training modules. This includes theoretical knowledge and getting to know the equipment and machinery. In effect, the training modules essentially involve simulations of work situations based on a skills-based approach (Prokopenko et al., 2020). Once the volunteer firefighter has passed the first initial training module, he or she can go on an intervention as an observer accompanying the usual personnel attending. This step is not compulsory, but is encouraged to facilitate the validation of subsequent modules. As soon as they have passed the essential modules enabling them to carry out certain types of intervention, volunteer fire fighters must start taking on-call duty and make themselves available in the same way as their colleagues. More generally, the fire station is a center for the development of social relationships, crucial for the activity and well-being of volunteers (Mitani et al., 2006). Finally, it plays an important role in this extensive initial training, alternating between training sessions and work periods.

Dropping out of training

Böhn and Deutscher (2022) consider dropping out as the abandonment of training before obtaining a qualification, through premature breach of contract. In the case of volunteer firefighters, it refers to individuals who signed a commitment and started their initial training, but resigned during the course before completing it in its entirety (although learners were able to complete certain modules). The resignation rate is high among volunteer firefighters at the start of their commitment, with around 35% of them ending it before the end of the first year (Roques & Passerault, 2014) which is mainly devoted to initial training. This population chooses to join and is generally highly motivated from the outset. Initial training is seen as important and necessary, but at the same time is considered too long and difficult to establish a balance between a successful professional activity and family life (Chevrier & Dartiguenave, 2008).

While a great deal of research has been carried out on student drop-out rates at university, few recent studies have been devoted to the drop-out rate in this specific type of training, which is also part of continuing vocational training. The most similar studies concern students who drop out during their vocational training (Böhn & Deutscher, 2022; Schmid & Stalder, 2012). The work of Shank and MacCracken (1993) which goes back further, is nevertheless similar to the problem of this research. They looked at adults who had undergone vocational training in Ohio, and developed a model for predicting training drop-out based on adapted independent variables. Their results show a link between dropping out of training and financial problems, problems with social and academic integration, and sometimes physical disability.

However, the situation of volunteer firefighters is different. Volunteering is not their main occupation, and training is not carried out on a full-time basis. In addition, the effects of the training environment on volunteer firefighter drop-outs have already been analysed using a qualitative approach (Born, 2023): if too many obstacles arise during initial training, individuals become demotivated and discouraged, and prefer to end their involvement. However, any consequences will be reduced since this choice will have no impact on the individual's professional career. What is more, the homogeneity of the ranks and the retention problems observed mean that particular attention needs to be paid to the profile of volunteer firefighters who drop out. The training environment could be taken into account at a later stage.

Methods

Data

The data was collected in a densely populated department in eastern France which has almost 5,000 firefighters, 86% of whom are volunteers. Volunteerism is very strong in this region, and around 400 new volunteer fire fighters are recruited every year. The region is divided into five companies. A company groups together several fire stations, providing an intermediate territorial network. Companies A, B and C tend to be urban, while companies D and E tend to be rural.[2]

The initial sample was divided into two groups: volunteer firefighters who had completed their initial training between 1 January 2018 and 30 June 2021 and who were still in service at the time of the survey (group 1), and individuals who had joined between 1 January 2018 and 31 December 2020, who had begun their initial training, but who had terminated their commitment before completing it in full, and by 30 April 2021 in the

latest (group 2). Group 1 comprised 485 individuals, but only 330 of them completed the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 68%. Group 2 comprised 93 individuals, but only 42 of them agreed to be interviewed, giving a response rate of 45%.

Group 1 was surveyed by questionnaire with the aim of understanding the different profiles of volunteer firefighters, as well as their commitment at this stage and their perception of initial training. The questionnaire was distributed online between February and July 2021. Group 2 was interviewed by semi-directive interview between March and June 2021, with the aim of understanding how they may have perceived their initial training, and the reasons for their resignation. Prior to the interviews, profile data was collected from the interviewees. This data was used to run the binomial logistic regression presented in the rest of this paper. An interview guide was used to support the semi-structured interviews. With the respondents' permission the interviews were systematically recorded and transcribed. Because of the pandemic in progress at the time of the survey, the interviews were conducted exclusively by telephone.

Analysis

This research is based firstly on the profile of the respondents, which should make it possible to check whether some are more likely than others to end their involvement during initial training, and secondly on the reasons for dropping out given by individuals who have interrupted their involvement and training. For the first part of the analysis, the profile data collected by questionnaire and interview were combined in a common database (372 observations). The two groups in the sample were distinguished by whether or not they broke off their commitment during their initial training. Some of the variables were too small in number and were therefore grouped together. This is particularly the case for the sociol-professional category of the respondent and his/her parents. Thus, farmers, craftsmen, shopkeepers, company directors, executives and higher intellectual professions were considered to be advantaged; individuals with an intermediate profession were considered to be intermediate; and finally, employees, manual workers and the economically inactive were considered to be disadvantaged. The sociol-professional category of students was determined from the sociol-professional category of their parents. Where there was a difference between father and mother, the higher of the two was retained.

The data was first analysed using binomial logistic regression with Jamovi software. To select the most relevant variables for inclusion in the regression, a step-by-step top-down selection was carried out using R software. As the presence of missing data is not permitted in this type of analysis, an imputation of missing data concerning the sociol-professional category of the respondent and his/her parents was carried out on the basis of the k-Nearest Neighbors algorithm. Given the small numbers involved, it did not seem appropriate to exclude individuals from the analysis because of a lack of data for three of the twelve variables tested.

The results were then supplemented by a manual thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews conducted with the dropouts. Following several readings of the available corpus, a number of themes were selected for analysis. They relate in particular to the organisation of the training, the trainers, the impact of the training and the commitment on family and professional life, also the atmosphere in the barracks. In this research the analysis focuses on the profiles identified as those most likely to drop out.

Ethical considerations

The research was guided by a comprehensive ethical framework. Firstly, all interviewees were given a clear explanation of the research process, as well as an assurance of the confidentiality and anonymity of the information collected. Given that some firefighters expressed reluctance towards research in general and distrust of their superiors, it was essential to assure them that they would not be disciplined by their superiors for their responses to the questionnaires or their comments during the interviews.

For the transcription of the semi-structured interviews the names of the interviewees were anonymised by attributing to each the letter A, followed by a number.

Participants

The profile of respondents was measured using twelve variables: gender, age, family situation, number of children, type of housing, educational attainment, respondent's sociol-professional category, sociol-professional category of respondent's father and mother, residential area, assigned company and presence of firefighters in social circle. The results are presented below (Table 1).

The profile of the volunteer firefighters in the sample corresponds fairly closely to the profile drawn up by other researchers (Pudal, 2011, 2016; Retière, 1994): a majority of men, young and from working-class backgrounds. Moreover, most of them are single, have no children and live in urban areas, i.e. towns with more than 2,000 inhabitants. These characteristics are common to both groups in the sample. However, in terms of gender, women are more represented in group 2. National statistics for volunteer firefighters show that women resign more quickly than men. Their commitment lasts on average 7 years and 4 months, compared with 11 years and 2 months for men (data from the Ministry of Interior for 2021).

Table 1. Profile of the respondents.

Variables	Modalities	Group 1 (n=330)		Group 2 (n=42)	
		Frequency	**% of total**	**Frequency**	**% of total**
Gender	Male	238	72.1 %	24	57.1 %
	Female	92	27.9 %	18	42.9 %
Age	From 16 to 25 years old	200	60.6 %	25	59.5 %
	From 26 to 35 years old	66	20.0 %	13	31.0 %
	From 36 to 45 years old	50	15.2 %	2	4.8 %
	From 46 to 55 years old	14	4.2 %	2	4.8 %
Family Situation	Single	211	63.9 %	28	66.7 %
	Married or in a marital Relationship	106	32.1 %	13	31.0 %
	Separated or Divorced	13	3.9 %	1	2.4 %

Number of Children	0	247	74.8 %	31	73.8 %
	1	28	8.5 %	7	16.7 %
	2	36	10.9 %	2	4.8 %
	3 or more	19	5.8 %	2	4.8 %
Type of Housing	Personal Residence	174	52.7 %	22	52.4 %
	Living with Others	156	47.3 %	20	47.6 %
Educational Attainment	Below Bachelor's degree	72	21.8 %	11	26.2 %
	Bachelor's degree	150	45.5 %	22	52.4 %
	Above Bachelor's degree	108	32.7 %	9	21.4 %
Socioeconomic Category of the Respondent	Advantaged	77	23.3 %	4	9.5 %
	Intermediate	61	18.5 %	9	21.4 %
	Disadvantaged	192	58.2 %	29	69.0 %
Socioeconomic Category of the Father	Advantaged	86	26.1 %	9	21.4 %
	Intermediate	46	13.9 %	3	7.1 %
	Disadvantaged	198	60.0 %	30	71.4 %
Socioeconomic Category of the Mother	Advantaged	40	12.1 %	2	4.8 %
	Intermediate	36	10.9 %	5	11.9 %
	Disadvantaged	254	77.0 %	35	83.3 %
Residential Area	Rural municipality	142	43.0 %	10	23.8 %
	Urban unit	188	57.0 %	32	76.2 %
Assigned Company	Company A	60	18.2 %	7	16.7 %
	Company B	58	17.6 %	13	31.0 %
	Company C	89	27.0 %	14	33.3 %
	Company D	76	23.0 %	6	14.3 %
	Company E	47	14.2 %	2	4.8 %
Presence of Firefighters in the Social Circle	Yes	134	40.6 %	31	73.8 %
	No	196	59.4 %	11	26.2 %

Results

The binomial logistic regression presented here is designed to predict the drop-out rate from initial training as a volunteer fire fighter, based on the individual's profile. The most relevant variables resulting from step-by-step top-down selection are the individual's sociol-professional category, gender, residential area, and the presence of volunteer firefighters in the social circle. When the twelve initial variables were introduced, the model had an AIC of 260.22. After selection, the AIC was 242.36. The retained variables were included as explanatory variables in the regression.

The model seems robust ($p<0.001$), as confirmed by the variance inflation factors (VIF), whose value is between 1.00 and 1.01 for all the variables introduced. The main results of the regression are listed below (Table 2).

Table 2. Logistic model estimating the probability of breaking an engagement as a function of individual characteristics.

Reference Category	**Active Category**	**Estimation**	**Significance**[1]	**Odds ratio**	**95% Confidence Interval**
Nagelkerke R^2 : 0.16			< 0.001		
Constant		-1.27	***	0.28	0.16 – 0.51
Male	Female	0.77	**	2.17	1.08 – 4.35
Unprivileged Socio-Professional Category	Privileged Socio-Professional Category	-0.98	*	0.38	0.13 – 1.14
	Intermediate	0.10	n.s.	1.11	0.47 – 2.59
Presence of Firefighters in Social Circle	Absence of Firefighters in Social Circle	-1.46	***	0.23	0.11 – 0.49
Urban Area	Rural Area	-0.97	**	0.38	0.18 – 0.82

1 * significant at the 10% level; ** significant at the 5% level; *** significant at the 1% level; n.s. = not significant as it exceeds the 10% threshold.

It appears first of all that a woman is more than twice as likely to break off her commitment as a man (2.17). The thematic analysis of the interviews shows that women are affected by the organisation of training and the availability required for meeting commitments, particularly because of their family responsibilities. When they have children, it is difficult for them to find enough time to follow the various training modules, which are organised over full weeks or several weekends in a row. At the same time, they have to take shifts at the fire station.

> I didn't see my son anymore. On Saturdays, I worked [...]. On Saturday afternoons I would normally collect my son, but if I was still a firefighter, [...] I wouldn't collect him until Sunday evening, and on Monday he'd go back to school. It's no longer a family life (Participant A6).

> I thought it would be a bit easier, not the training itself, I'm talking about following the training, compared to family life and the constraints of everything else. It caused me a lot of problems (Participant A31).

The organisation of initial training is generally designed to meet the availability of young people, still in high school or university, who make up a very large proportion of new recruits. This organisation is less compatible with older women who are involved in family and professional life.

Women also have great difficulty integrating into the barracks. Of the 18 women surveyed, 11 (61%) said they had encountered problems of sexism in their barracks. This was not the case for the men surveyed. It was generally a matter of heavy-handed jokes or criticism of women's ability to do a man's job.

> When I did my sports tests, there was also a man [...], there was staring, [...] there was also flirting, even by text message. (Participant A17)

> You know, I've had a few dirty jokes. [...] You're a woman, so basically there were things you couldn't do. [...] You could tell that women were inferior to them. (Participant A24)

Sometimes, discrimination is also observed in the tasks assigned. One respondent explained, for example, that in her fire station, housework was generally entrusted to women. In addition, two women interviewed had been particularly harassed and had called in the gendarmerie. Overall, it seems difficult for women to integrate into this still very male-dominated environment. They still have difficulty finding their place and earning respect. Some discuss this with their center managers, but their reaction is disappointing: they take little or no action, and the women concerned end up preferring to end their involvement.

In addition, sociol-professional category is only predictive of breaking off commitment during initial training in one case, and only at the 10% threshold: advantaged individuals are almost three times less likely than disadvantaged individuals to break off their commitment (1/0.38). Like women, individuals from advantaged social classes are in the minority in the overall sample. However, unlike the women, they are almost absent from group 2, which concerns drop-outs. The four advantaged individuals in this group are still pupils or students. They are aged between 17 and 21. There are two women and two men. Two live in rural areas. The thematic analysis of the interviews shows that the reasons for their involvement differ: A16 signed up to discover a new environment; A34 signed up to follow a family tradition; A36 saw it as an opportunity to play sport and increase his income; A41 signed up following a communication campaign by his fire station. All four are satisfied with their overall experience in the fire service.

> It really was my second family and we were always together, I don't know how to put it, it was always supportive. Well [...] it boosted my self-confidence. (Participant A34)

> They were satisfied with the initial training, both in terms of content and the group of learners and trainers. They described a pleasant atmosphere and interesting content. It was more rewarding than I expected. (Participant A16)

> I was very happy with all the knowledge I had learned. [...] I remember we had a very good group atmosphere. (Participant A36)

At the fire station, their experience was also fairly positive, except for one of them who noted tensions between volunteer and professional fire fighters. He had a hard time with this situation, which he did not understand.

> There was a kind of rivalry [...] the volunteer firefighters were bickering with the professional firefighters [...] I didn't understand what was going on. [...] I didn't necessarily understand, it made me a bit angry. (Participant A16)

They decided to end their involvement for a variety of reasons: Participant A16 left because of tensions between volunteers and professionals in his fire station; Participant A34 ended her involvement following a sexist incident that traumatised her; Participant A36 left because she had not managed to find her place in a rural fire station that did few interventions and was not very sporty; Participant A41 mentioned a lack of time and a geographical distance related to his studies. The four advantaged individuals in group 2 would like to return to their commitment one day.

The binomial logistic regression also shows that individuals with local knowledge at the time of their involvement are more likely to end their involvement during their initial training. In fact, the risk of an individual with no firefighters in their circle deciding to end their involvement is 4 times lower than for an individual with firefighters in their circle (1/0.23). Nearly three-quarters of group 2 reported the presence of firefighters among their family and friends. Six of them joined the fire brigade as part of a family tradition.

> It's a family thing, because nearly all my family are firefighters. So I grew up with it, and [...] I've been interested in it since I was very young. (Participant A42)

The thematic analysis revealed representations of the activity that were sometimes fantasised and far removed from reality. These representations were based on the accounts of their family and friends, who probably only told them about the strongest and most memorable moments of their involvement. The respondents had built up an image of volunteer firefighting that was quite far removed from the day-to-day life they subsequently experienced at the fire station: more than three-quarters of the interventions corresponded to rescuing victims and helping people, with missions that were sometimes less than sensational. In fact, 7.5% of these operations involve lifting a person, for example, while 16% involve transporting people when private medical transport is unavailable.

> My father was a volunteer fireman, long before I was born, and when he told me all the things he did [...] it was always a sort of fantasy to be able to do the same thing as him. (Participant A34)

> I have a father-in-law who is in the fire brigade, and a half-brother too, so that also made me want to do it, because they told me what was going on, the operations and all that, and that really interested me. (Participant A39)

For four respondents, on the other hand, the desire to join the fire brigade developed from a heroic representation of the activity, based on their own experience as a victim or on fictional accounts. For example, even though they knew firefighters, they explained that something clicked in them that led them to get involved themselves.

> I went to see a film at the cinema, and from there, I don't know, it just clicked. [...] It was a way of making myself useful, and it was the superhero aspect that I liked. (Participant A2)

> I got involved because I was married and in 2017, I lost my husband in a road accident. That triggered something in me and I said to myself that I had time to give, that I could give it to others, by trying to save others as much as possible. (Participant A28)

The rhetoric conveyed by the fire fighters themselves, but also the heroic image of the fire fighter portrayed by society, seems to have a major influence on some people's decisions to enlist. Their disappointment can then be immense when they come up against the reality of the missions, but also the reality of everyday life in the fire stations and the difficulties in organising initial training, for example.

> After a while, the fire station chief asked if we could come at weekends. You had to do more than twenty-four hours, whereas when I first signed up, I was told that you give as much time as you can. (Participant A25)

The statements made by the respondents concerned reveal a degree of disillusionment. Although they had signed up, generally displaying strong motivation and a desire to make themselves useful in their turn, they ultimately came up against an environment that was sometimes harsh and far removed from the idyllic picture widely disseminated in society.

Finally, the regression shows that an individual living in a rural area is almost three times less likely to drop out than an individual living in an urban area (1/0.38). Among urban drop-outs, the most frequently cited reason for breaking off the scheme was reconciling commitment, work and family life (13 respondents). In some cases, it was a change of job or the arrival of a child in their lives that explained their unavailability. Other people had not realised at the outset how time-consuming volunteering could be. Four respondents emphasised the time-consuming nature of the training. They were unable to reconcile it with their personal and professional lives and preferred to stop.

> At work, I didn't have enough time for training and on-call duty. So I gave priority to the professional side. (Participant A11)

> It's really a question of time. Between my job and my growing family life, it was very complicated. (Participant A33)

The organisation of the training over several years and the increasing demands made on volunteers in terms of availability seem to contribute to the drop-out of city dwellers. However, the start of higher education is also a factor in resignation. Four respondents were concerned. University towns are a long way from home, and they generally only return at weekends, so they no longer have time to devote to the volunteer fire service.

The atmosphere at the fire station is also a key factor in retaining volunteers. In towns and cities, fire stations are large and the number of staff is high. Volunteer firefighters often work alongside professional firefighters, which can create tension. New recruits seem to have more difficulty integrating. Among the urban respondents, five had decided to stop their involvement, either because of the general atmosphere at the fire station, or because of a particular event linked to this atmosphere.

> The atmosphere [...] was friendly at first. [...] I knew most of the people, but in the end, when I joined the fire station, I saw a lot of jealousy between team members and things like that. And then there was pettiness too, we teased each other. [...] When it's going on all the

> time, it's a bit heavy. And yes, I didn't take it well, I really didn't take it well, that's what made me leave. (Participant A28)

Team spirit, which is necessary in this activity, can be affected by problems of atmosphere and tensions between individuals. In the end, it is the long-term commitment of volunteer fire fighters that suffers.

For ease of reading, the results of the thematic analysis carried out following the identification of the profiles most likely to drop out are summarised below (Table 3).

Table 3. Summary table of the thematic analysis

Profile of respondents	**Theme**	**Highlights**	**Reasons for disengagement**
Women	Time-consuming aspect of training and commitment	- Family life (especially having children) can be incompatible with the required availability - Regular on-call duty at the fire station - Training courses are organised at weekends or during school vacations	Difficult to reconcile commitment, private life and professional life
	Fire station atmosphere	- Integration difficulties - Sexism - Disappointing reactions from some center managers	Difficulty accepting women in the community
Privileged individuals	Reasons for joining	- Willingness to discover a new environment - Wish to follow in family tradition - Willingness to play sports and increase income - Response to a communication campaign	
	Satisfaction with commitment	- Satisfactory overall experience - Satisfaction with initial training - Positive fire station experience	Willingness to re-enlist one day

Individuals with firefighters in their social circle	Representations of the firefighter's activity	- Fantasy representations - Gap between representations and reality in the field	Disillusionment
Urban dwellers	Time-consuming aspect of commitment and training	- Individuals have many activities outside their commitment - Entry into student life for the youngest recruits	Difficult to reconcile commitment, private life and professional life or studies
	Fire station atmosphere	- Large urban fire stations - Integration difficulties	Difficulties integrating into the fire station

Discussion

This research proposes a two-stage analysis, which first showed that gender, social background, entourage and place of living are important predictors of long-term commitment among volunteer firefighters. It then enabled us to focus on a thematic analysis targeting dropout profiles.

Women seem to encounter a number of difficulties integrating into the fire brigade, which is still very male-dominated. This finding is in line with previous research (Gouliquer et al., 2020; Hom et al., 2017; Pfefferkorn, 2006) and suggests a gendered approach to selection among volunteer firefighters (Born, 2023). Beyond the problems of sexism at the fire station, women often have significant family responsibilities. In many households, particularly among the working classes, there is still a gendered division of roles within the couple (Coutrot, 2021; Vagni, 2019). Women have to look after the children, in addition to managing their professional activity. The time they can devote to initial training is therefore limited and its organisation is not adapted to their lifestyle. The fact that female volunteer fire fighters drop out early is in line with the work of Shank and MacCracken (1993), who show that people with major family responsibilities tend to abandon their training.

Moreover, individuals from privileged social classes are in the minority in the sample and more generally in the ranks of volunteer firefighters (Retière, 1994), but their commitment ultimately appears more stable than that of disadvantaged individuals. In other volunteering contexts, Nicourd (2008) and Hayton and Blundell (2021) highlight the low level of participation of disadvantaged social classes in public life for a collective cause. Volunteering with the volunteer fire department is something of an exception, but over the long term, the attachment of advantaged individuals to this type of activity is stronger. This finding can be interpreted as an indication of the relevance and satisfaction that individuals from privileged social classes find in their commitment to the volunteer fire department, thanks in particular to the team spirit omnipresent in the milieu. However, the results show that this commitment is mainly motivated by personal aspirations rather than altruistic motives. As a result, these individuals seem more likely to seek opportunities for personal development than to commit themselves out of altruism or solidarity.

Individuals with prior knowledge of the firefighting environment at the time they joined were more inclined to end their involvement in the first few years, focused on initial training. They sometimes idealised the activity, relying on the stories of their social circle, but were quickly disappointed when they had their own experiences. This result does not go in the same direction as the work of Gazzale (2019), who showed, on the contrary, that the presence of close friends and family in the environment before joining was beneficial for the volunteer firefighter's social development. These factors raise the question of recruitment in France in particular: are information programs sufficiently realistic about the nature of missions? A drop-out rate as early as initial training suggests that word-of-mouth, while important (Lantz & Runefors, 2020), is not enough and needs to be supplemented by clear, official information.

Finally, the results looked at the drop-out rate among city dwellers during initial training. The gap between urban and rural dwellers can be explained first and foremost by different representations of commitment. Indeed, Chevrier and Dartiguenave (2011) have shown that committed individuals in rural areas are likely to be more attached to their territory and to want to participate in the local life of their commune. But there are other explanations too. Needs in urban fire stations are greater than in the countryside, and center managers have to find solutions to ensure they can respond to the needs of the population. At the same time, initial training is time-consuming. This situation gives individuals the impression that the availability they have to offer is exaggerated, given their volunteer status. A departmental fire and rescue service in south-west France, for example, advertises on its website that a volunteer firefighter is required to perform a minimum of 900 hours of activity per year, which represents more than 17 hours per week. Nearly half of the Group 1 respondents in this research devote at least 25 hours a week to their commitment, and a third even more than 35 hours a week after completing their initial training. In Germany, commitment occupies an average of 8.3 hours a week (Mayr, 2017), while this figure rises to 20 hours in Portugal (Dias et al., 2022). Expectations of French firefighters are therefore high, not least because the proportion of firefighters in the population is relatively low compared with the European average (Chevreuil, 2010), with just 357 firefighters per 100,000 inhabitants, compared with 687 in Luxembourg, and even 1,250 in Germany, for example.

When it comes down to it, the fact that the profiles identified drop out during initial volunteer firefighter training is not so much due to the training itself as to the general organisation of the commitment and the environment encountered in the fire station. The overall conditions in which initial training takes place are important. To complete their training, new recruits need to feel welcome, supported and accompanied in the development of their skills. On the contrary, the risk of dropping out is amplified by a feeling of abandonment and lack of benevolence, in an environment that is nevertheless renowned within society for its altruism. In the end, the environment can be experienced as hostile, and the feeling that there is no point in continuing takes over.

Conclusion

This research was carried out as part of a doctoral thesis, funded by a fire department. The research project was built on a collaboration between the university and the fire department, and was intended to help the latter better understand the retention problems they currently face, particularly among certain profiles such as women and the most highly educated individuals.

Volunteer status remains precarious, and a system essentially based on voluntary work requires measures to support individuals and develop a pleasant environment. This

is necessary to guarantee long-term commitment and avoid the exclusion of certain profiles. The cost to society of dropping out early during initial training is high: new people have to be recruited and trained all the time, but there is no positive effect on overall volunteer numbers. Dropouts have faced difficulties in integrating into a harsh system, where cliquishness is significant (Pudal, 2011, 2016). Their abandonment was almost inevitable. However, solutions do exist and could be applied across the board to help retain volunteers and limit the risk of early drop-out.

Firstly, fire station communication strategies should take into account the high drop-out rate during initial training. Providing candidates with clear information on what is expected of them at the time of recruitment, and paying particular attention to the reasons for enlisting, individual expectations and sources of influence, could help future volunteers to develop expectations that are closer to reality.

Secondly, fire station managers need to foster a harmonious and respectful atmosphere, which is crucial to volunteer retention. Even if human needs are ever greater to ensure a steadily increasing number of interventions, individuals cannot be constantly faced with the challenge of time management and multiple constraints. Too much pressure and the use of injunctions end up discouraging some people who prefer to leave. French volunteer firefighters are among those assigned the widest range of tasks (Chevreuil, 2010). It could be envisaged to recruit and train volunteer firefighters only for specific types of intervention, depending on the time they can devote to the commitment.

At this stage, the regression model has only focused on profile-related factors that can lead to volunteer firefighters dropping out of initial training. Factors linked to the training environment and life at the fire station have deliberately not been taken into account. Nevertheless, following on from the work of Shank and MacCracken (1993), a model could now incorporate them into the analyses. Furthermore, these results focus on France. If loyalty issues can be adhered to in many other countries, it would be worth checking whether these results could be generalised.

Notes

[1] The data presented here comes from the ministries responsible for the fire department in the countries in question.

[2] The data presented here comes from the departmental fire and rescue service for the area under study.

Declaration of conflicting interests

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

References

Billett, S. (2023). Learning across working life: Educative experiences and individuals' participation. *Studies in Continuing Education,* 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037x.2023.2221650

Born, P. (2023). La sélection informelle en formation initiale de sapeur-pompier volontaire [Informal selection for initial training as a volunteer fire fighter]. *E-JIREF*, *9*(1), 103-121. https://doi.org/10.48782/e-jiref-9-1-103

Buyruk, H. (2014). "Professionalization" or "Proletarianization": Which Concept Defines the Changes in Teachers' Work? *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 116, 1709-1714. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.460

Böhn, S., & Deutscher, V. (2022). Dropout from initial vocational training – A meta-synthesis of reasons from the apprentice's point of view. *Educational Research Review*, 35. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2021.100414

Carré, P., Caspar, P., Frétigné, C., & Las Vergnas, O. (2024). *Traité des sciences et des techniques de la Formation* [A treatise on the sciences and techniques of training]. Dunod.

Chevreuil, S. (2010). Manager l'implication du volontaire. Le cas des sapeurs-pompiers [Managing volunteer involvement. The case of firefighters]. *Revue internationale de psychosociologie*, *16*(40), 119-141. https://doi.org/10.3917/rips.040.0119

Chevrier, S., & Dartiguenave, J. Y. (2008). *Étude sur l'avenir du dispositif de volontariat chez les sapeurs-pompiers* [Study on the future of the volunteer fire department system]. Bureau d'études et de conseil sociologiques MANA pour la Direction de la Sécurité Civile. https://www.pompiers.fr/sites/default/files/text-reference/2009_09_01_-_etude_sur_le_volontariat_mana_lares.pdf

Chevrier, S., & Dartiguenave, J. Y. (2011). Autres figures et autres territoires: les recompositions du volontariat chez les sapeurs-pompiers [Other figures, other territories: The changing face of volunteerism among firefighters]. *Espaces et sociétés*, *4*(147), 155-172. https://doi.org/10.3917/esp.147.0155

Coutrot, T. (2021). Double journée et conditions du travail professionnel: une analyse statistique renouvelée [Double day and professional working conditions: A renewed statistical analysis]. *Cahiers du Genre*, 70, 107-136. https://doi.org/10.3917/cdge.070.0107

Curado, C., Henriques, P., & Ribeiro, S. (2015). Voluntary or mandatory enrollment in training and the motivation to transfer training: Motivation to transfer training. *International Journal of Training and Development*, *19*(2), 98-109. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijtd.12050

Dias, P. C., Oliveira, I. M., Rodrigues, A., & Peixoto, R. (2022). Burnout: Personal and work factors in volunteer and career firefighters. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, *31*(8), 17-34. https://doi.org/10.1108/ijoa-05-2022-3278

Dirzyte, A., Perminas, A., Kaminskis, L., Žebrauskas, G., Sederevičiūtė – Pačiauskienė, Z., Šliogerienė, J., Suchanova, J., Rimašiūtė – Knabikienė, R., Patapas A., & Gajdosikiene, I. (2023). Factors contributing to dropping out of adults' programming e-learning. *Heliyon*, *9*(12), e22113. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e22113

Gazzale, L. (2019). Motivational implications leading to the continued commitment of volunteer firefighters. *International Journal of Emergency Services*, *8*(2), 205-220. https://doi.org/10.1108/ijes-12-2017-0063

Gouliquer, L., Poulin, C., & McWilliams, J. (2020). Othering of Full-Time and Volunteer Women Firefighters in the Canadian Fire Services. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, *16*(3), 48-69. https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.16.3.04

Hayton, J. W., & Blundell, M. (2021). Exploring the relationship between social class and sport event volunteering. *Sport Management Review*, *24*(1), 92-115. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2020.06.002

Holdaway, S. (2017). The re-professionalization of the police in England and Wales. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, *17*(5), 588-604. https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895817690214

Hom, M. A., Stanley, I. H., Spencer-Thomas, S., & Joiner, T. E. (2017). Women Firefighters and Workplace Harassment. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 205*(12), 910-917. https://doi.org/10.1097/nmd.000000000000075-

Horn, G. P., Stewart, J. W., Kesler, R. M., DeBlois, J. P., Kerber, S., Fent, K. W., Scott, W. S., Fernhall, B., & Smith, D. L. (2019). Firefighter and fire instructor's physiological responses and safety in various training fire environments. *Safety Science*, 116, 287-294. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssci.2019.03.017

Lantz, E., & Runefors, M. (2020). Recruitment, retention and resignation among Non-Career Firefighters. *International Journal of Emergency Services*, *10*(1), 26-39. https://doi.org/10.1108/ijes-02-2020-0009

Mayr, M. L. (2017). Transformational Leadership and Volunteer Firefighter Engagement. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, *28*(2), 259-270. https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.21279

McClelland, C. E. (1990). Escape from Freedom? Reflections on German Professionalization 1870-1933. In R. Torstendahl & M. Burrage (Eds.), *The Formation of Professions: Knowledge, State and Strategy* (pp. 97-113). Sage.

Meyer, J., & Allen, N. (1993). Commitment to Organizations and Occupations: Extension and Test of a Three-Component Conceptualization. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *78*(4), 538-551. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.78.4.538

Ministry of Interior [Ministère de l'Intérieur]. (2021). *Les statistiques des services d'incendie et de secours* [Fire and rescue service statistics]. Direction Générale de la Sécurité Civile et de la Gestion des crises.

Mitani, S., Fujita, M., Nakata, K., & Shirakawa, T. (2006). Impact of post-traumatic stress disorder and job-related stress on burnout: A study of fire service workers. *The Journal of Emergency Medicine*, *31*(1), 7-11. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jemermed.2005.08.008

Monteiro, P., Melo, M., Valente, A., Vasconcelos-Raposo, J., & Bessa, M. (2021). Delivering Critical Stimuli for Decision Making in VR Training: Evaluation Study of a Firefighter Training Scenario. *IEEE Transactions on Human-Machine Systems*, *51*(2), 65-74. https://doi.org/10.1109/thms.2020.3030746

Nicourd, S. (2008). Qui s'engage aujourd'hui? Regards sociologiques sur la participation [Who gets involved today? A sociological look at participation]. *Informations sociales*, 145, 102-111. https://doi.org/10.3917/inso.145.0102

Pfefferkorn, R. (2006). Des femmes chez les sapeurs-pompiers [Women in the fire department]. *Cahiers du Genre*, *40*(1), 203-230. https://doi.org/10.3917/cdge.040.0203

Prokopenko, O., Osadchenko, I., Braslavska, O., Malyshevska, I., Pichkur, M., & Tyshchenko, V. (2020). Competence Approach in Future Specialist Skills Development. *International Journal of Management*, *11*(4), 645-656. https://iaeme.com/Home/article_id/IJM_11_04_062

Pudal, R. (2011). Du « Pioupiou » au « Vieux Sarce » ou comment en être: ethnographie d'une socialisation chez les pompiers [From "Pioupiou" to "Vieux Sarce" or how to be one: Ethnography of firefighter socialization]. *Politix*, *24*(93), 167-194. https://doi.org/10.3917/pox.093.0167

Pudal, R. (2016). *Retour de flammes. Les pompiers, des héros fatigués?* [Backlash. Are firefighters tired heroes?]. La Découverte. https://doi.org/10.3917/dec.pudal.2016.01

Retière, J. N. (1994). Être sapeur-pompier volontaire: du dévouement à la compétence [Being a volunteer fireman: From dedication to competence]. *Genèses*, 16, 94-113. https://doi.org/10.3406/genes.1994.1249

Roques, M., & Passerault, J. M. (2014). Conflit de rôles et engagement volontaire: le cas des sapeurs-pompiers [Role conflict and voluntary commitment: The case of firefighters]. *Gestion et management public*, *3*(1), 3-16. https://doi.org/10.3917/gmp.031.0003

Schmid, E., & Stalder, B. E. (2012). Dropping Out from Apprenticeship Training as an Opportunity for Change. *Transitions and Transformations in Learning and Education*, 117-130. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-2312-2_8

Shank, J. A., & McCracken, J. D. (1993, December). *Dropout and completion in adult vocational job training programs: A prediction model for the adult vocational student*. Paper presented at 1993 American Vocational Association, Ohio State University, USA.

Vagni, G. (2019). Alone Together: Gender Inequalities in Couple Time. *Social Indicators Research*, *146*(3), 487-509. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-019-02135-7

Wheeler, S. G., Engelbrecht, H., & Hoermann, S. (2021). Human Factors Research in Immersive Virtual Reality Firefighter Training: A Systematic Review. *Front. Virtual Real*, 2. https://doi.org/10.3389/frvir.2021.671664

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2025, pp. 115-134

Made in the EU: Dual Europeanisation and the rhetorical construction of adult education (2000-2022)

Fátima Antunes
University of Minho, Portugal (fantunes@ie.uminho.pt)

Abstract

This paper addresses the processes involved in the Europeanisation of adult education, with a particular focus on the limitations of EU policies aimed at increasing adult participation in education and learning. Mobilising relational, multidimensional Europeanisation perspectives as tools for understanding, the research is methodologically supported by the analysis and discussion of documentary and statistical data. The Portuguese case study illustrates the emergence of dual Europeanisation processes in education through national policy options, trajectories and outcomes. This study offers new insights into the role of national contexts in influencing the evolution of European policies. It elucidates the ways in which EU guidelines are either absorbed or accommodated, as well as instances of transformation, inertia or retrenchment in the pursuit of European targets for adult participation in education across member states. This analysis sheds light on shortcomings of outcomes achieved in about two decades of (rhetorical?) construction of European adult education policy.

Keywords: adult education, European education policy, Europeanisation, participation in education, lifelong education and learning

Introduction

The European Union (EU) initially established policies pertaining to participation in education through the implementation of the Education & Training 2010 (ET2010) Programme, within the framework of the lifelong learning strategy, as an instrument contributing to the global reform programme of the Lisbon Strategy (2000-2010). That framework expresses 'policy concerns on the need to widen access and participation by policy makers at national and European levels […] largely for economic reasons to enhance the skills of the workforce in a competitive global world' (Merrill et al., 2024, p.

ISSN 2000-7426

© 2025 The author
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/
http://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.5442
www.rela.ep.liu.se

7). The ET2010 Programme was succeeded by the Education & Training 2020 (ET2020) Programme and the more recent European Education Area (2021-2030) (EEA2030) Initiative, and all three strategic frameworks set objectives and benchmarks, through the *open method of coordination* of policies, which in turn feed the European dimension of national education policies. Three of the initial six benchmarks, pertaining to *early school leavers*, *completion of upper secondary education* and *lifelong learning*[1], are concerned with policies of participation in education and are common to ET2010 and ET2020[2]. Twenty years on (European Commission, 2023c; Eurostat, 2023f; Eurostat, 2023g), the targets set by these European education policies of participation in education have been achieved, by the EU and Portugal, with the exception of *adult participation in learning*[3]. This paper intends to discuss some of the Europeanisation processes involved in the shortcomings of the EU policy aimed at enhancing the participation of adults in education and learning.

The so-called Portuguese case[4] in education is interesting because, having been an isolated case in the EU at the turn of the century with very low levels of formal education among both its young and adult populations, it has now achieved (and even surpassed) the European participation targets and the average rates observed for youth education, but not for adult education. This approach enables an analysis of the Portuguese case of Europeanisation in participation policies for education targeting young people and adults. It may help to articulate arguments that shed light on aspects of the failure of the European policy to improve adult participation in education.

This study addresses the following research questions:

(1) What is the Portuguese case of Europeanisation of public policies of participation in the field of education, both for young people and adults?
(2) What factors and processes have marked these more than twenty years of European policy to expand adult participation in lifelong education?

This study adopts a theoretical-methodological approach to the analysis of education policies combining the *policy cycle approach* (Bowe et al., 1992; Ball & Avelar, 2016) with the *multiscalar governance* proposal (Dale, 2005). The *context of influence* and the supranational scale of EU policies are discussed, as well as the national dimension as an instance of policy translation and interpretation. This *multiscale*, *multi-actor* perspective of education policy analysis provides the framework for an empirically based analysis, supported by secondary sources. These include documentary/bibliographical sources, which provide a socio-historical context, and official statistical data, which describe the empirical educational phenomena under analysis.

Next, we begin by highlighting perspectives on Europeanisation, with a particular focus on the field of education; in a second stage, the national mediation in contradictory directions of European education participation policies and the fabrication of a generational divide, between levels of education of young and adult population in Portugal, are substantiated on the basis of documentary sources and official statistics. Finally, the asymmetrical stagnation of adult participation in education and training in the EU context over several decades is discussed as a partial result of the Europeanisation process.

This study provides new knowledge about the contribution of the *national* dimension or mediation of the European priority of expanding adult participation in education and training. The Portuguese case illustrates contours of the fabrication of Europeanisation processes in education through national mediations: policy options, processes, trajectories, outcomes. The paper brings to the fore the *absorption*, *accommodation* or even *transformation* centred on EU guidelines as feeding, respectively, a (s)low,

moderate or substantial change in existing public policies, practices or institutions, or the *inertia* or *retrenchment* in the pursuit of European targets for adult participation in education in many Member states; this argument is an attempt to shed some light on the poor results of almost two decades of (rhetorical?) construction of European adult education policy.

(Relational, multidimensional) Europeanisation perspectives as tools for understanding

The debates surrounding the *Europeanisation* of public policies raise the most acute questions about the contours of the field of study itself, as well as the analytical rigor and relevance of the concept for delimiting phenomena, grasping sociopolitical relations, 'understanding the multifaceted and continuously developing process' (Grek & Russel, 2024, p. 216; Radaelli, 2000; Dale & Robertson, 2009). Some research suggests that in education, as in other fields, when debating *Europeanisation*, it is important to analyse the implications not only of the interconnections between European and national priorities, options, guidelines and political institutions (Andersen & Eliassen, 1993), but also of the creation of a European education sector and a European education policy (Dale & Robertson, 2009).

It is a widely accepted argument that member states of EU, and a large array of subnational (collective/individual) actors, interpret, modify or set preferences when building European policies, goals or guidelines 'in accordance with their traditions, institutions, identities, and resources, thereby limiting the degree of convergence and homogenization' of institutions, policies, and processes towards a common European model (Jambrovic & Maresic, 2020, p. 9). In this sense, some researchers observe 'partial' and/or 'clustered convergence' (Jambrovic & Maresic, 2020, pp. 25-26), with *absorption*, *accommodation* or even *transformation* centred on EU guidelines, according to a low, moderate or substantial change in existing public policies, outcomes, practices or institutions; *inertia*, even resistance can feed divergence between member states (Börzel & Risse, 2000; Klatt, 2023). This is why the national dimension and mediation of European policies are understood as processes of translation and recontextualisation (Jambrovic & Maresic, 2020; Börzel & Risse, 2000; Klatt, 2023; Ball & Avelar, 2016), that is, political processes mobilising resources (from interest coalitions to interpretative communities, the economic structure or institutional pathways) rooted in the national space. Thus, even discursive and goals convergence is often accompanied by policy responses, trajectories and results constructed from the particular context of each member state.

'[E]uropeanization on move' or 'the power of ideas' problematise that more formal model perspective and the predominantly teleological view, underscoring the sociopolitical processes and the spread of practices and ideas (Baer, 2020; Alexiadou & Rambla, 2022; Ostrouch-Kamińska et al., 2021). When it concerns human rights, identity (trans)formation or citizenship practices and movements, like adult education and learning (Barros et al., 2021; Frias et al., 2022; Doutor & Alves, 2024), it is important to observe and question reality movement, mobilising an enlarged network of theoretical tools. This is more so as far as several actors at both national and European level can, as argued through recent research, work 'together to increase their chances to influence Communitarian policies' paralleled with the fact that 'neither EU institutions (e.g., the Council of the EU) or Member States (…) are completely independent actors, nor are they monolithic actors' and they 'can operate according to different logics to steer the

policy process and setting of Communitarian agendas' (Milana & Mikulec, 2023, pp. 224-225).

It is important to note that, within the framework of the discussion outlined here, the term convergence is taken in the descriptive sense, to designate the approximation to European reference parameters for indicators defined within the scope of structuring European educational policies in the last few decades: the Education & Training 2010 (ET2010) and Education & Training 2020 (ET2020) Programmes, and the more recent European Education Area Initiative (EEA) (Commission of the European Communities, 2002; Council of the European Union, 2009, 2021). As argued, 'a Europeanization process in education, a distinctive spatial, political, and scientific process', seriously means that 'questions can be asked about the significance of national policies when a transnational policy emerges with its own policies, agencies, and indicators. What is implied about the convergence of educational systems in Europe?' (Grek and Lawn, 2009, p. 52). It is admissible that, as Dale points out, 'there is little sign of convergence between nation-states in their decisions and responses to the common challenges that they face' (2005. pp. 130-131), without this meaning that what they make decisions about, or what is excluded from this prerogative, constitute domains in which there is room for the exercise of an 'autonomous agency'[5], on the part of nation-states. Thus, the ability to define the (*globally structured*) *agenda* for education integrates the protagonism of powerful supranational actors, in *contexts of influence* of the *policy cycle*, as well as other policy-making frameworks that articulate multiple scales, in which local, subnational, national and global actors, spaces and dynamics are reciprocally constituted (cf. Bowe et al., 1992; Ball & Avelar, 2016), in such a way that 'policies, processes or practices, (…) can vary quite independently of each other' (Dale, 2005, p. 144).

The concept of *Europeanisation* has been invoked in the literature to describe these sets of processes. However, both from an analytical and empirical standpoint, we are dealing with distinct, albeit connected, socio-political phenomena and relations. Today, they are inseparable processes, suggesting a relational and multidimensional approach, allowing for an understanding of education policies as dynamic realities that comprise multiple scales and dimensions, and considering the European and national spaces as interdependent processes, relations and dimensions that are mutually constitutive. Throughout this fabric, 'the boundaries between the European, national, and local levels are overlapping and fluid as Member States' governments and administrations also relate to European level actors' (Sorensen & Eeva, 2024, p. 167). Thus, it is possible, using a two-way approach, to understand the features and the dynamics of creation of a European education sector and a European education policy, as well as to analyse the options and priorities of the national education policies within that framework. In the field of adult education studies, there is a substantial body of research that examines the processes of developing a European sector and policy (see, for example, Holford & Milana, 2014; Milana & Mikulec, 2023). The mobilisation of resources, as well as the translation and interpretation work, within this framework of guidelines, goals and targets, carried out at national, local and institutional levels, have also been extensively studied (see, for example, Mikulec & Krašovec, 2016; Doutor & Guimarães, 2019).

In this multidimensional relational perspective, in the following section, we call for the Europeanisation of (adult) education for over two decades as a *context of influence* (Bowe et al., 1992; Ball & Avelar, 2016). We admit that this scenario of political action constitutes an important source of discourses, purposes and concepts, which animate national options and courses of action; in this sense, we observe, document and substantiate specific processes of national mediation (transformation, commitment, accommodation, reluctance or inertia) towards European educational policies. As noted

before, the empirical basis of this study is: (i) the official public statistical data organised in Table 1 and 2, and provided by the sources systematically listed in the respective caption and throughout the paper; (ii) the adopted strategic frameworks ET2010, ET2020, EEA2030 and, in particular, the benchmarks and indicators agreed upon by the EU authorities and member states, within the scope of such programmes. Focusing on the *context of the results/effects* (Ball & Avelar, 2016) of European education policy in its own terms, that is, the benchmarks adopted by the EU member states for participation in education, the discussion in the following two sections illuminates the manifestations of dual Europeanisation in Portugal and suggests the hypothesis of a rhetorical construction of adult education for all, in Portugal and in the EU.

The context of influence and the national mediation of European education policies: Disparity in trajectories and results

The 'Portuguese educational realities' and the Portuguese 'case'

The dynamics generated around the Lisbon Strategy and the adoption of the lifelong learning strategy articulated a 'shift' to a 'new arithmetic of inequalities in education at the European level' to anchor the 'European social investment strategy' (Normand, 2021, pp. 361, 365-368). In a context in which the project of economising education (Antunes, 2016) will become programmatically and explicitly hegemonic, 'the rhetoric of the EU 2020 benchmarks and the common priorities of EU policy frameworks and programmes in the field of education policy' had gained momentum by 'shaping the agenda setting to re-imagine education as a tool for economic policies' (Eeva, 2021, p. 14). In this framework, following the turn of the 21st century, the open method of coordination (OMC) of policies developed to respond to the Education & Training 2010 (ET2010) Programme shines an intense light on the Portuguese case of low qualifications among the active population[6]. We should understand this: the diagnosis had been known for, at least, more than 10 years (Carneiro et al., 1988). It included the perception that raising the education levels of the young population would have a minimal impact on the population's average educational levels, given the demographic realities of a drastic reduction in the weight of new generations, the prolongation of work activity and an increase in average life expectancy. Furthermore, as has been widely documented, for example by Nóvoa (2005; see also, Carvalho et al., 2019), the prevalence of an argument built around Portuguese *backwardness* is a centuries-old constant in the debate on (educational) realities and proposals and projects for change in Portuguese society. This is not unrelated to, among other historical realities, the structural positioning of Portuguese social formation in the interstate system (Ramirez & Boli, 1987), often featuring as (one of) the poorest of the rich countries in modern, wealthy western Europe.

Studies on Portuguese society suggest lines of analysis and interpretation of such societal dynamics and political options:

1. First, the perspective of an *unfinished modernity* (Abrantes, 2012) which finds support in the idea of the prevalence of a *programmed obscurantism* involving Portuguese elites and decision-makers (Melo, 2004);
2. Second, the understanding that the Portuguese semi-peripheral condition also involves an *articulated discrepancy* between patterns of reproduction and social consumption close to countries at the centre of the world system and the EU, and

a retrograde norm of production close to countries on the periphery and semi periphery of the world system (see Santos, 1990; Santos & Reis, 2018)[7];
3. Third, the multiple structural asymmetries of Portuguese society (Mauritti, et al., 2019), now reproduced by meandering pathways that articulate educational mobility with social reproduction between generations (Martins et al., 2016).

Valente and Wochnik (2008), when discussing the Portuguese case, to answer questions about dynamics of convergence/divergence and reforms of national vocational training systems driven by European education and training policies, argued with some factors to which this exceptionality of the Portuguese case (of low qualifications of the population, in particular its very long duration) can be attributed. Thus, 'the Portuguese realities', when referring to the schooling processes and education levels of the population, also point to a conglomerate of socio-institutional traits and societal options such as: educational policies; the socioeconomic and business landscape and structure; the individual demand for continuing education and training.

In this sense, one may evoke the centuries-old *disinvestment* manifested in the very low average level of education and very high rate of illiteracy among the Portuguese population during most of the 20th century (Martins et al., 2016); the most recent educational policies already in democracy, whose failures to comply with the right to education remained active, and very slowly have been overcome, with sequels and gaps; a school of masses belatedly consolidated simultaneously with its crisis (Stoer, 1994); the slow growth and stagnation of secondary education during nearly 30 years of democracy (Antunes, 2019); and the blocked project of a permanent public policy and structure for adult education and training (Melo et al., 2002; Lima, 2007). Conversely, the perpetuation of an economic, productive and business structure and fabric based on sectors in which low added value products, low wages and qualifications prevail has implications for the scarcity of incentives and rewards for individual demand for continuous education and training, particularly among those in employment in the lowest-paid occupational roles[8]. The persistence of this last structural feature has fuelled the adverse qualified emigration of young Portuguese professionals for more than a decade and highlights asymmetries, gaps and imbalances in Europeanisation processes (King, 2019).

Given this very brief contextualisation of Portuguese *educational realities* – including the Portuguese *case* of very low levels of educational attainment throughout the 20th century – what is suggested by the results observed in the framework of European policies on participation in education since the turn of the century, which, as argued above, have been a powerful *context of influence* on national policies ('Europeanisation')?

National mediation and the dual Europeanisation of education in Portugal

In this section, I will address the research question concerning the Portuguese case of Europeanisation of public policies of participation in the field of education, both for young people and adults. As previously stated, I will focus on the *context of the results/effects* (Ball & Avelar, 2016) of European education policy in its own terms, that is, the benchmarks adopted by EU member states for participation in education.

It can be argued that observing the *outcomes* of national public policies on participation in the field of education, both for young people and adults (5th column of Table 1), for the five benchmarks and indicators (1st and 3rd columns of Table 1; and 4th column) adopted by the EU member states for participation in education (2000-2022) (2nd column), allows us to identify the *trajectory* (of convergence or divergence) of the

aforementioned outcomes. Furthermore, it enables us to discern the processes of inertia, absorption, accommodation or transformation, centred on European guidelines (*Europeanisation modalities*) (6th column of Table 1), according to the degree of change in existing national outcomes, which can be low, moderate, substantial or non-existent (Börzel and Risse, 2000; see also Dobrić Jambrović & Marešić, 2020).

The analysis of statistical data on Portugal's situation with regard to European policies on participation in education (2002-2022) reveals a generational divide between the population aged 25-64 and those aged 20-24, with the former displaying lower levels of educational attainment than the latter (see Table 1)[9] and problematises the political choices that generate that duality of outcomes.

Table 1. Indicators and targets of European education and training policies and the Portuguese case of dual Europeanisation (2000-2022). Source: Developed by the author based on statistics from Eurostat (2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2023d)

Statistical indicators	European public policy	European benchmark	European average rate	Portugal	Trajectory/ Modality of Europeanisation[1]
Early school leaving (18-24 years)	EEA Initiative 2030 (EEA2030) UE2020 Strategy/ Programme E&T 2020 (ET2020)	< 9% (2030) 10% (2020)	9.6% (2022) 9.9% (2020) 16.9% (2002)	**6% (2022)** 8.9% (2020) 45% (2002)	Convergence/ ***Transformation***
Population with at least an upper secondary education (20-24 years)	EEA2030 UE2020 Strategy/ ET2020	 85% (2020)	83.6% (2022) 84.3% (2020) 79.6% (2011)	**89.3% (2022)** 85.3% (2020) 64.6% (2011)	Convergence/ ***Transformation***
Population with tertiary educational attainment (25-34 years)	EEA2030 UE2020 Strategy/ ET2020	45% (2030) 40% (2020)	42% (2022) 40.5% (2020) 23.1% (2002)	**44.4% (2022)** 41.9% (2020) 15.3% (2002)	Convergence/ ***Transformation***
Population with, at most, lower secondary educational attainment (25-64 years)			20.5% (2022) 21% (2020) 27% (2011)	**39.7% (2022)** 44.6% (2020) 65.4% (2011)	Divergence (compared to the European average)/ ***Absorption*** or ***Accommodation***
Adult participation in learning in the past four weeks (25-64 years)	ET2020 EEA2030	15% (2020) 47% (2025)[2]	11.9% (2022) 9.2% (2020) 5.3% (2002)	**13.8% (2022)** 10% (2020) 2.8% (2002)	Divergence (considering the 2020 European benchmark)/ ***Absorption*** or ***Accommodation***

[1] According to the above-mentioned analytical proposal of Börzel and Risse (2000), and Jambrovic and Maresic (2020).

[2] Nowadays, in the strategic framework of European Education Area (2021-2030), a new benchmark and indicator has been adopted: 'At least 47% of adults aged 25-64 should have participated in learning during the last 12 months, by 2025'. See European Commission (2023b).

According to the data organised in Table 1, and considering the typology of modalities of Europeanisation of national education policies proposed by Börzel and Risse (2000; see also Dobrić Jambrović & Marešić, 2020), we could argue that Portugal, during these twenty years, has followed a dual path, in view of the accorded European benchmarks: (i) the *transformation* of young people's education levels and (ii) the *accommodation* or moderate change in the education levels of the adult population.

So, a Portuguese case with unique contours has been designed by European participation policies in education developed since 2000, with the open method of coordination within the scope of the ET2010 and ET2020 Programmes and the EEA (2030) initiative: at first, atypically low levels of schooling among the population, followed by a continued and now achieved *convergence* with European averages and targets, with regard to reference parameters and indicators adopted in relation to young people's educational levels, as can be observed in Table 1; yet continued *divergence* with European averages and targets, regarding the parameters and indicators of schooling levels and participation in education of the adult population and, consequently, regarding the Portuguese population in general (Eurostat, 2023c, 2023d, 2023h) (see Table 1). And, in this context, the Portuguese case takes on contrasting tones, with the attribution and claim of success and exemplary persistent improvement for two decades, with regard to the initial education of young people (Teodoro, 2022). Such performance will contradictorily highlight and hide the indelible deficit generated by the *structural invariant* (Lima, 2007) of lacking a permanent, global and integrated public policy and system (Melo et al., 2002), capable of responding to social needs and aspirations, with a view to fulfilling the fundamental right to education of the adult population (Fragoso & Fonseca, 2022).

Even a brief glance at the 50 years of democracy since April 25 of 1974, is enough to confirm the thesis advanced by educational activists and academics, according to which

> the considerable discontinuity of adult education policies […] is due to the absence of a minimally stable guiding thread in educational policies. Political-educational logics, priorities, organizational and administrative dimensions, even conceptual elements, change frequently, interrupting or abandoning certain policies to make way for others and so on. (Lima, 2007, p. 72)

The 'intermittency of policies', the absence of an '(institutional and budgetary)' public system, the fragmentation of the field and demobilisation/demotivation 'of audiences and actors' (Canelas & Ramos, 2019, p. 62) continued to be repeatedly evoked (see also Barros, 2016; Capucha, 2018).

Meanwhile, the 'structural invariant' of the 'lack of consensus' and 'policy discontinuity' is also explained by the divergence between 'different approaches to the educational and cultural promotion of adults: permanent education, second-chance schooling and professional training for the job' (Melo, 2017, p. 3).

As is revealed by the analysis of the data in Table 1, the Portuguese case is therefore also a unique case of the fabrication of a generational fracture due to the duality of national political options regarding convergence/divergence with quantitative reference standards and European realities in education. The aforementioned outcomes, as evidenced by the official data and subsequent analysis, illustrate that Portuguese governments (institutions, actors, and other resources) have actively mediated European education and training policies: in Portugal, a notable trajectory of *change and convergence* with European benchmarks can be observed with regard to the education levels of the younger population (2002-2022), stimulated by European policies of participation in education; however, this is not the case with regard to the indicators relating to the adult population (2002-2022). Even more so as there is a naturalisation of a perspective and an orientation of action in which 'The adult population itself has lost its identity, ending up conceptually rejuvenated by reference to 'second-chance education' for young adults and restricted to the 'active population' for the purposes of 'professional qualification'.' (Lima & Guimarães, 2018, p. 615). This cleavage is to be expected taking into account the factors and options for public education policies mentioned above; against all evidence, including demographics, those have set a

trajectory of persistent absence of permanent public policy and system, as far as the adult population is concerned. The data presented in Table 1 show that the *divergence* of the structure of low levels of education of the Portuguese adult population is maintained compared to the generality and the average of the EU countries. In this way, over the two decades covered by the analysed data, we observe a low or moderate change in the levels of educational attainment and participation of the adult population, which, as argued above, suggests the absorption or accommodation of European guidelines and targets (Börzel and Risse, 2000; see also Dobrić Jambrović & Marešić, 2020). This pathway of Europeanisation appears to combine the national appropriation of the discourses and objectives of European policies, which are focused on increasing adult participation in lifelong education, with the prevailing pattern of the national education system. As previously discussed, for adult education, these characteristics include a 'lack of consensus', 'policy discontinuity' and the absence of an 'institutional and budgetary' public system.

Europeanisation, contradictory agendas and outcomes: State commitment and participation in adult education

Routes of Europeanisation of adult education

The evolution of socio-political relations pertaining to the Europeanisation of education can be examined through a two-way approach, which offers insights into the development of a European education sector and policy while also enabling the analysis of national education policies. Educational researchers agree on the following points: (i) The 1970s saw the inception of EEC intervention; (ii) this was further advanced through the implementation of community action programmes from the mid-1980s onwards, fostered by the Single European Act and the Single European Market; (iii) the Maastricht Treaty (1992) marked a shift in the EU's engagement with education, after article 126 of the Treaty gave the EU responsibility in this domain, a mandate that has been expanded; and (iv) in this second phase of the Europeanisation of education, a Community agenda and policy on education and training were established, and have remained in place, since 1999. These have been developed under the auspices of the Community institutions and have been informed by the Bologna Process, the Copenhagen Process, and the Education & Training 2010 (ET2010) Programme (Antunes, 2006; Rasmussen, 2014a). Subsequently, the Education & Training 2020 (ET2020) Programme was developed, followed by the European Education Area (EEA2030) Initiative, which was launched in 2021 and will run until 2030.

It has been argued that the process of Europeanisation of education, which has been underway for more than two decades, has resulted in two growing trends. On the one hand, the political and economic centrality of education, training, and learning has been emphasised through the adoption of *lifelong learning* as a flagship project, and the development of the ET2010 and ET2020 programmes under the Lisbon Strategy and EU 2020 agenda. At the same time, the Bologna Process and the Copenhagen Process were instrumental in the establishment of the European Education Area with market-oriented regulatory processes and instruments. These include a degree structure, a credit system, a European Qualifications Framework and quality assurance systems (Antunes, 2016). From this perspective, the processes of Europeanisation of education contribute to and are shaped by a *globally structured agenda for education* (Dale, 2000; Antunes, 2006). This agenda stems from the actors, resources and pathways required and available,

particularly in EU and national instances. The centrality of education has resulted in the high priority given to *participation*, and in a path towards the *democratisation* of education, which has been long sought by those aspiring to realise the right to education as a public good anchored in the public sector.

These decades of Europeanisation, as a process and project of development of the aforementioned trends, have been marked by disputes and tensions surrounding education. These debates centre on its role as a fundamental human right, a marketable commodity, an economic and employment policy, and a policy for the creation of 'Europe' (see Lawn & Nóvoa, 2005; Antunes, 2006, 2016).

Europeanisation does not necessarily result in the *convergence* of national education policies. Moreover, policy options are not exclusively guided by political authorities (Holford & Milana, 2014). Instead, national, institutional, and practical mediations appear to play an equally significant role in shaping education alongside the European policy framework (Rasmussen, 2014b; Cavaco et al., 2014).

In a recent paper, Boyadjieva and Ilieva-Trichkova (2018) argued that, as a *common good*, adult education appears to be a *reality* only in a limited set of four EU countries (Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Luxembourg); in nine (Austria, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Norway, and Spain) of the twenty-four member states studied it appears to be *achievable* or even a *possibility* (in the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovenia) and, in other countries, it presents itself as an *ambiguous* (Belgium, Malta, Slovakia), *problematic* (Italy and Greece) or *invisible* (Romania) horizon. In line with what had been discussed, the authors argue ‘that the extent to which adult education as a common good is accomplished in a given society/country reflects its accessibility, availability, affordability and the social commitment to its functioning and that it depends on a country’s specific institutional arrangements’ (Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichkova, 2018).

In examining the constitution of adult education as both a field of intervention and a component of the European education sector and policy, the two trends mentioned above have been identified and documented: (i) the centrality of adult education/widening participation, together with (ii) the development of policy instruments and the constitution of adult education as a market. This pathway of Europeanisation of adult education has been proposed, with four moments identified so far (while a fifth is possible): 1) the *thematisation* of adult education as a Community intervention area; 2) adult education as a *dimension of lifelong learning*: the Education & Training 2010 Programme; 3) the *European agenda* for adult education - quality and participation; 4) between *political centrality and absence of policies*?, and 5) a *new opportunity* for Adult Education? (Antunes, 2020).

It has been argued that, after more than 25 years of *Europeanisation*, adult education remains a fragile priority, without political weight to overcome obstacles such as the precariousness of public policies and structures or the fragmentation of measures and educational responses with a one-dimensional *mandate* of residualist instrumentality. The growing centrality of adult education (thematisation, lifelong learning dimension, European agenda, a new opportunity...) is associated, in this path of Europeanisation, with the asymmetrical stagnation (among EU member states) in the participation of the adult population in lifelong learning, and with the persistent *incapacity*[10] of the measures taken by countries to achieve the objectives defined in this area (Antunes, 2020). Consecutive researchers reinforce ‘the need for an integrated approach to the analysis of participation in adult learning, incorporating the influence of factors at different levels’ (Ilieva-Trichkova & Boyadjieva, 2024, p. 14).

Officially recognised in 2019 in documents from the European Commission (European Commission, 2019), the fact that certain member states have opted for the sidelining of adult education goes back to the *policy cycle* (the different contexts of action) (Bowe et al., 1992; Ball & Avelar, 2016) of European policies (Europeanisation). In that sense, and strongly correlated with these outcomes, a particular form of Europeanisation emerges in the background: the absence of a systemic approach and the temporary and fragmented funding of adult education and training, which in themselves constitute a mode of policy development typically disseminated and imported within EU policy intervention (Mikulec & Krašovec, 2016; Tuparevska et al., 2020; Klatt, 2023). As a supranational regional organisation, the EU filters and conveys a *globally structured agenda for education* (see Dale, 2000), also through the European adult education policy; the *national mediation* of this one (*Europeanisation*) is carried out through existing national institutions, priorities, actors, projects and other resources, or those that can be generated. Interpretation, translation and articulation of problems, solutions, institutional models, norms and standards involved in that European policy generate *globally structured* national (regional, local, institutional) policies for adult education.

A notable exception: The asymmetric stagnation in adult participation in education

At the same time, the singular Portuguese case illustrates the relevance of the new world educational order (Field, 2000; Laval & Weber, 2002; Antunes, 2007), including multiscale contexts of political action: both the European and national dimensions of education policies vehiculate and filter political agendas (priorities, guidelines, problems, solutions, models of institutions or projects). In this sense, the Portuguese case highlights the recontextualisation of European policies and the global-local nexus, illuminating what is also a notable exception in European education policies[11]:

1. The stagnation of European average adult participation rates in lifelong learning, with the
2. Failure of the European policy to increase adult participation in education and training, which
3. Reproduces asymmetries in adult participation in lifelong learning over twenty years and two programmes, ET2010 and ET2020, highlighting national specificities and growing disparities between EU member states.

Thus, as can be seen from Table 1, between 2002 and 2022, the average annual growth (0.33 percentage points (pp)/year) of the *European rate of adult participation in learning in the past four weeks (25-64 years)*[12] fell far short of achieving the European benchmark 2010 (12.5%) or 2020 (15%). Not only that, but the gap between member states exponentially widened as well: from 17.4 pp in 2002 to 34.5 pp of difference between the lowest (1.7%) and highest (36.2%) participation rate among EU27 member states in 2022[13]. It should be underlined that this is not about comparing totally different realities, the EU15 of 2002, the EU27 of 2011, the EU28 of 2013 or the EU27 of 2022. The point proposed strictly considers the values of the above-mentioned indicator, observed over the 2002-2022 time series, for each of the 27 countries that make up the EU27 (from 2020). It can be seen that, until 2022, in those very different contexts, unlike most referred targets of European education, the Union hasn't reached the agreed outcomes for adult participation in education and training; and the gap within the EU has widened.

Revisiting the aforementioned research question, what can help us understand this notable exception with regard to the Europeanisation of education policy, as expressed by the benchmarks adopted for the development of ET2010 and ET2020 programmes and strategic frameworks?

I will now examine the official data on the *outcomes* of national public policies regarding adult participation in learning, focusing specifically on the relevant European benchmark. This analysis will cover the period under review (refer to the 2nd and 3rd columns of Table 2) and will assess whether these outcomes converge or diverge from the ET2020 benchmark (4th column of Table 2) and the EU member states' average (5th column of Table 2). Additionally, for each member state, the *modality of Europeanisation* (inertia, absorption/accommodation, or transformation) can be identified (1st and 6th columns of Table 2) based on the pace of change (non-existent, low, moderate, or substantial) in the national results (3rd column of Table 2).

Table 2. Participation of adults in learning in the EU Member States - changes since 2002 and the modalities of Europeanisation. Source: Developed by the author based on statistics from Eurostat (2023e)[1]

EU Member states	**Adult participation in learning in the past four weeks (25-64 years) (2022) (%)**	**Change since 2002**	**Convergence with European benchmark ET2020 (15%)**	**Convergence (or exceeding) European average rate of adult participation in learning** (11.9%, 2022)	**Modality of Europeanisation**[2]
Estonia	21.1	15.8 pp/ 0.79 pp/year	2016		***Transformation***
Slovenia	22.3	13.9 pp/ 0.69 pp/year	2004-2008; 2010-2011; 2021-2022[3]		
Spain	15.2	10.7 pp/ 0.53 pp/year	2022		
Luxembourg	18.1	10.4 pp/ 0.52 pp/year	2015		
Austria	15.8	8.3 pp/ 0.41 pp/year	2017-2018; 2022		
France	13.2 (19.5 by 2019)	10.6 pp/ 0.53 pp/year	2013-2019	2013 (17.8%) 2022 (13.3%)	***Transformation***? ***Absorption*** or ***Accommodation***?
Portugal	13.3	10.5 pp/ 0.52 pp/year	------------------------	2020 (9.8%)	***Absorption*** or ***Accommodation***
Malta	13	8.6 pp/0.43 pp/year	------------------------	2017 (10.6%)	
Slovakia Ireland Cyprus Belgium Latvia Italy Czechia Lithuania Germany Hungary Poland Romania Croatia Greece Bulgaria	1.6 to 12.8	0.4 pp/0.02 pp/year to 4.3 pp/0.21 pp/year	------------------------	------------------------	***Inertia***
Sweden	36.2	17.8 pp/0.89 pp/year	Not applicable (n/a)	n/a	n/a
Denmark	27.9	9.9 pp/0.49 pp/year	n/a	n/a	n/a
Netherlands	26.4	10.6 pp/0.53 pp/year	n/a	n/a	n/a
Finland	25.2	7.9 pp/0.39 pp/year	n/a	n/a	n/a

[1] To construct Table 2, we considered the 2002-2022 time series, as the data for all member states for the indicator in question is only available from 2002 onwards.

[2] See note 13 above.

[3] Slovenia reports a slightly unstable rate of participation of adults in education and training, as measured by the indicator concerned, in the time series 2002-2022; for a better understanding of adult education and learning field, system and policy in Slovenia, see Mikulec and Guimarães (2023) and Govekar Okoliš (2024).

Mobilising the typology of Europeanisation modalities proposed by Börzel and Risse (2000; see also Dobrić Jambrović & Marešić, 2020), one could suggest that the European asymmetrical stagnation of levels of adult participation in education, observed in 2022, relates to:

- The very few countries where the agreed ET2010 and ET2020 benchmarks14 were followed by transformation in order to reach and converge with those European goals (Estonia, Slovenia, Spain, Luxembourg and Austria)[15]
- The other very few countries that seem to be following the paths of absorption or accommodation, with (s)low or moderate change, in their approach to the European benchmark and thus reaching or exceeding the European average rate (France, Portugal or Malta[16])
- The situation of most EU member states, which appear to have a significant inertia in terms of adult participation in education and learning, consistently deviating from the benchmarks set over the last twenty years. As the European Commission (2023a) points out in a current report: 'The first main challenge is uneven implementation progress among Member States, with large discrepancies in upskilling opportunities available for low-skilled adults' accompanied by 'the often still small scale and insufficient effective outreach of implementation measures', and 'the dominant role of project-based EU funding as opposed to structural domestic funding' (p. 7).

Closing remarks: Dual Europeanisation and the rhetorical construction of adult education in the EU?

This text examines the process of Europeanisation of education, including the national dimension of educational policies and viewed as interactive dynamics that are mutually constituted. It highlights the complexity of these more than 20 years of European adult education policies and seeks to clarify certain facets of national policy options within the framework of the European dimension of the new world educational order. Analysing statistical data about participation in education, in the context of some benchmarks accorded by EU member states, we could observe and understand disparate processes of Europeanisation and its outcomes in Portugal: the *transformation* in the levels of participation of young people in education contrasts sharply with the (s)low change in the levels of education and participation of the adult population (and the *absorption* or *accommodation* of European accorded objectives). Answering the research questions, we suggest that dual Europeanisation or disparate modalities of Europeanisation are observable in Portugal in terms of: (i) over these more than 20 years, Portuguese governments (institutions, actors and other resources) have actively mediated European education and training policies; (ii) this included compromising with or refusing to, for the young or the adult population respectively, policy options in favor of convergence with agreed benchmarks and targets for participation in education; (iii) a notorious generational fracture was thus fabricated in Portuguese society.

The creation of a European adult education policy and sector over the past twenty-five years appears to be marked by contradictory factors, processes and options: in the foreground, the appreciable hegemony of a residualist instrumental mandate stands out for lifelong education; this action area stays positioned at the centre of the economy and at the top of political priorities, forged in the search for competitiveness, productivity and employability. Secondly, in apparent opposition to this political centrality and priority,

the asymmetrical stagnation of adult participation in education and training in the EU and the persistent incapacity to achieve the defined goals outline the contradictory articulation of Europeanisation processes. The data concerning the participation of adults in learning in the EU member states over the past two decades indicate that only a small number of countries are pursuing a path of *transformation* with notable alterations, and an even smaller number of member states are following an *absorption* or *accommodation* path, with (s)low or moderate change, in order to achieve convergence with the agreed ET2010 and ET2020 benchmarks. In most countries a considerable *inertia* exists with regard to adult participation in education and learning. This is evidenced by a consistent deviation from the benchmarks that have been set over the past twenty years, which have been consistently missed by the majority of EU member states.

These developments point to the hypothesis of a rhetorical construction of adult education within the EU political space[17]. This perspective highlights the significant time lag between the expression of interest, intentions, and goals for adult education participation and the enactment of policies capable of achieving them. In this process, the national appropriation of discourses and objectives of European policies, often substantively contradictory in themselves, can combine with the *societal effect* of the *pattern* of the national educational system (for example, the Portuguese case). In this way, varied and moving multi-scale Europeanisations could be generated, from *accommodation* or *transformation* to *inertia*, with political, institutional and socio-historical dimensions in contradiction or conjugation.

Notes

1 ‘By 2010, an EU average rate of no more than 10% early school leavers’; ‘by 2010, at least 85 % of 22-year-olds in the European Union should have completed upper secondary education’; ‘by 2010, the European Union average level of participation in Lifelong Learning, should be at least 12.5% of the adult working age population (25-64 age group)’ (Council of the European Union, 2003).

2 Nonetheless, the ET2020 Programme introduces a revised benchmark for lifelong learning: ‘By 2020, an average of at least 15% of adults should participate in lifelong learning.’ Additionally, the 2010 indicator and benchmark for upper secondary education attainment reappears later with a modified age range (20-24 years instead of 22 years) as a secondary complementary target: ‘Population with at least upper secondary attainment (%) (20-24 years)’ (European Commission/Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2012, p. 55).

3 As mentioned before, adult participation in learning (25-64 age group) is the indicator adopted for *lifelong learning*, a largely debatable decision, which cannot be analysed in depth here.

4 As highlighted in the Eurostat publication *Educational attainment statistics*, ‘The share of people aged 20-24 with at least an upper secondary qualification has been agreed as a supplementary indicator to the EU level target for early leavers from education and training. (…) [between 2012 and 2022] Spain and Portugal reported the largest increases, 15.7 pp and 21.5 pp respectively’ (Eurostat, 2023h).

5 I am grateful to the unknown reviewer for suggesting the use of this or a similar expression.

6 ‘Low qualifications among the active population’ is a political-cognitive and normative construction evoked in this discussion to contextualise the intervention of international organisations in defining problems, response models and action frameworks (Dale, 2000; Teodoro, 2001, 2022) that thematise a global agenda and an educational model of global ambition (Laval and Weber, 2002).

7 These investigations and arguments underline how the adoption of consumption patterns characteristic of countries at the core of the global system would lead to an increase in the demand for education among young people and a corresponding increase in state intervention. The regressive norm of production, more like that observed in the periphery and semi-periphery countries, would serve to perpetuate the archaic economic structure based on low wages and low skills, combined with intermittent state intervention and support for social mobilisation around adult education.

8 In multiple studies, the majority of adults surveyed state that their professional situation has not changed following the completion of a level of studies (or even a professional qualification) in adult education (e.g., Lima & Guimarães, 2012).

[9] As we can see, there is some variability about the data available in the sense that, according to each European policy, the first data available can refer to a different year (2002 or 2011) (Eurostat, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2023d, 2023e, 2023f, 2023g, 2023h).

[10] *Capacity* constitutes one of the sub-dimensions of analysis of educational policies proposed by Dale and Ozga (1991, p. 14); according to the authors, *capacity* encompasses what is considered *possible* to assume and carry out in education and, together with the *mandate*, configures the *scope* of a given educational policy.

[11] However, as underlined, 'the EU has not met its target to reduce *underachievement in basic skills* to less than 15% and little progress has been achieved over the past decade' (European Commission, 2020, p. 2).

[12] On average, over the past 20 years, this rate has grown by 0.33 pp/year. This value is considerably below the 0.54 pp needed to reach the EU benchmark of 15% of adult participation in learning in the past four weeks (25-64 years), by 2020.

[13] See Eurostat (2023e). See the values of the indicator in hand that are available in this time series between 2002 and 2022, for each of the countries that compose the EU27 (from 2020), plus Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Turkey; for these last four countries there are years in which data are unavailable. See also Eurostat (2024).

[14] Adult participation in education benchmark for ET2010 programme (12.5%) and for ET2020 programme (15%); see above notes 2 and 3.

[15] France could be considered a sixth country to undergo a *transformation* in the participation of adults in learning during the 20-year period of Europeanisation of adult education, from 2002 to 2022. However, its distinctive trajectory, as evidenced by the statistical data, calls for a more in-depth analysis that is beyond the scope of this discussion (see, for instance, Meilland, 2023). It is also important to note that some member states (Sweden, Denmark, Finland or the Netherlands) have already achieved the EU targets for adult learning participation before 2000 (Eurostat, 2023e).

[16] Although at first glance Slovakia could be included in this group of countries in 2022, if we look at the development of the level of adult participation in learning in Slovakia between 2002 and 2022, it becomes clear that it is not yet possible to argue that there is a consistent movement towards the European average level of adult participation in learning (Eurostat, 2023e). For a better understanding of adult education and learning field, system and policy in Slovakia, see Lukáč and Lukáčová (2024).

[17] I use the expression 'rhetorical construction of adult education' in the EU political space by analogy with one of the explanations of the political construction of the mass schooling 'as part of an endeavor to construct a unified national polity' (Ramirez & Boli, 1987, p. 3; Soysal & Strang, 1989, pp. 279, 285-286), throughout the 19th century. This argument is proposed to characterise processes in which the announcement of interest in education took many decades to materialise through the increase in participation in education. Portugal is one of these studied cases of 'precocity and rhetoric' of declaration of intentions by the State, without the capacity to implement, the universalisation of education (Araújo, 1996). In addition to the official statistical data, empirical studies in different geographies of the EU can be called upon to outline the hypothesis of the rhetorical construction of adult education in the EU, due to the failure, over decades, of increasing adult participation in education and training (see, for example, Sava & Luştrea, 2017; Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichkova, 2018, or Campbell, 2020).

Declaration of conflicting interests

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

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by CIEd – Research Centre on Education, Institute of Education, University of Minho, projects UIDB/01661/2020 and UIDP/01661/2020, through national funds of FCT/MCTES-PT.

I would like to express my gratitude to the two anonymous peer reviewers for their careful and rigorous evaluation of this text, as well as for their constructive recommendations.

References

Abrantes, P. (2012). A escola como motor de uma modernidade dual [The school as the engine of a dual modernity]. *Sociologia On line Revista da Associação Portuguesa de Sociologia*, 5, 6-33.

Alexiadou, N., & Rambla, X. (2022). Education policy governance and the power of ideas in constructing the new European Education Area. *European Educational Research Journal*, *22*(6), 852-869. https://doi.org/10.1177/14749041221121388

Andersen, S., & Eliassen, K. (Eds.) (1993). *Making policy in Europe: the Europeification of National Policy-making*. Sage publications.

Antunes, F. (2006). Globalization and europeification of education policies: Routes, processes and metamorphoses. *European Educational Research Journal, 5*(1), 38-56. https://doi.org/10.2304/eerj.2006.5.1.38

Antunes, F. (2007). A nova ordem educativa mundial e a União Europeia: a formação de professores dos Princípios Comuns ao ângulo Português [The new world educational order and the European Union: Teacher education from Principles Common to the Portuguese Perspective]. *Perspectiva*, *25*(2), 425-468.

Antunes, F. (2016). Economising education: From the silent revolution to rethinking education. A new moment of Europeanisation of education? *European Educational Research Journal*, *15*(4), 410-427. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904116641696

Antunes, F. (2019). Formar uma elite ou educar um povo? Quarenta anos de ensino secundário em democracia [Forming an elite or educating a people? Forty years of secondary education in a democracy] *Sociologia, Problemas e Práticas*, 89, 53-77. http://doi.org/10.7458/SPP2019898702

Antunes, F. (2020). Europeanisation and adult education: Between political centrality and fragility. *Studies in Continuing Education*, *42*(3), 298-315. https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2019.1615425

Araújo, H. C. (1996). Precocidade e «retórica» na construção da escola de massas em Portugal [Precocity and «rhetoric» in the construction of mass schooling in Portugal]. *Educação, Sociedade & Culturas*, 5, 161-174. https://repositorio-aberto.up.pt/bitstream/10216/14467/2/83394.pdf

Baer, M. (2020). Europeanization on the move. LGBT/Q activist projects in contemporary Poland. *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*, *6*(3), 53-73. https://doi.org/10.17356/ieejsp.v6i3.653

Ball, S. J., & Avelar, M. (2016). Interview with Stephen J. Ball: Analysing his contribution to education policy research. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 24, 1-13. http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.24.2368

Barros, R. (2016). Diversificação, massificação e esvaziamento da oferta de educação e formação de adultos (EFA) em Portugal: Algumas reflexões e inquietações [Diversification, massification and depletion of the Portuguese offer of adult education and training: Reflexions and anxieties]. *Revista Portuguesa de Pedagogia*, *50*(1), 13-36. https://doi.org/10.14195/1647-8614_50-1_1

Barros, R., López, A. R., & Granero Andújar, A. (2021). LGBTI sexualities and intersectional research. Looking for inclusion beyond gender in adult learning and education (ALE) practices. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *12*(2), 149-164. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.3316

Bowe, R., Ball, S. J., & Gold, A. (1992). *Reforming Education and Changing Schools. Case Studies in Policy Sociology*. Routledge.

Boyadjieva, P., & Ilieva-Trichkova, P. (2018). Adult education as a common good: Conceptualisation and measurement. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *37*(3), 345-358. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2018.1478458

Börzel, T., & Risse, T. (2000). When Europe hits home: Europeanization and domestic change. *European Integration Online Papers* (EIoP), *4*(15). Accessed August 14, 2023, from https://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/2000-015a.htm

Campbell, L. R. (2020). The adult learning project in the age of austerity. In B. Merrill, C. Vieira, A. Galimberti, & A. Nizinska (Eds.), *Adult education as a resource for resistance and transformation: Voices, learning experiences, identities of student and adult educators* (pp. 71-78). ESREA/FPCE-UC/CEAD-Ualg publications. https://esrea.org/publications/books-from-the-networks/

Canelas, A. M., & Ramos, F. (2019). *Educação e formação de adultos* [Relatório Técnico] [Adult education and training]. Conselho Nacional de Educação. Accessed March 16, 2023, from https://www.cnedu.pt/pt/publicacoes/outros?start=6

Capucha, L. (2018). Educação de adultos: a ideologia conta [Adult education: Ideology counts]. *Forum Sociológico*, 32, 17-27. https://doi.org/10.4000/sociologico.1938

Carneiro, R., Soares, M. C., São Pedro, M. E., Abecasis, M. M., & Grilo, E. M. (1988). *Portugal. Os próximos 20 anos. Educação e emprego em Portugal. Uma leitura de modernização* [Portugal. The next 20 years. Education and employment in Portugal. A modernisation reading]. Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian.

Carvalho, L. M., Viseu, S., & Gonçalves, C. (2019). Bridging worlds and spreading light. In C. E. Mølstad, & D. Pettersson (Eds.). *New practices of comparison, quantification and expertise in education: Conducting empirically based research* (pp. 111-126). Routledge publications.

Cavaco, C., Lafont, P., & Pariat, M. (2014). Policies of adult education in Portugal and France: The European Agenda of validation of non-formal and informal learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *33*(3), 343-361. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2014.896086

Commission of the European Communities. (2002). *Communication from the Commission. European benchmarks in education and training: Follow-up to the Lisbon European Council*. Accessed February 8, 2025, from https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52002DC0629.

Council of the European Union. (2003). *Council Conclusions on Reference Levels of European Average Performance in Education and Training (Benchmarks)*. Accessed March 22, 2024, from https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8981-2003-INIT/en/pdf

Council of the European Union. (2009). *Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020')*. Accessed February 8, 2025, from https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52009XG0528%2801%29

Council of the European Union. (2021). *Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) 2021/C 66/01*. Accessed February 8, 2025, from https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32021G0226(01)

Dale, R. (2000). Globalization and Education: Demonstrating a 'Common World Educational Culture' or Locating a 'Globally Structured Educational Agenda'? *Educational Theory*, *50*(4), 427-448. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2000.00427.x

Dale, R. (2005). Globalisation, knowledge economy and comparative education. *Comparative Education*, *41*(2), 117-149. https://doi.org/10.1080/03050060500150906

Dale, R., & Ozga, J. (1991). *Introducing education policy: Principles and perspectives*. The Open University.

Dale, R., & Robertson, S. (Eds.) (2009). *Globalisation and Europeanisation in education*. Symposium Books.

Dobrić Jambrović, D., & Marešić, M. (2020). The subnational dimension of Europeanization. *Review of European and Comparative Law*, *42*(3), 7-49. https://doi.org/10.31743/recl.4997

Doutor, C., & Alves, N. (2024). 'I feel different…': Learning experiences and identities of African students in higher education. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *15*(1), 47-62. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.4778

Doutor, C., & Guimarães, P. (2019). Adult education and lifelong learning policies: An analysis of Greece and Portugal. *Studies in Adult Education and Learning*, *25*(1), 15-31. https://doi.org/10.4312/as.25.1.15-31

Eeva, K. (2021). Governing through consensus? The European semester, soft power and education governance in the EU. *European Educational Research Journal*, Epub ahead of print, December 5, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1177/14749041211055601

European Commission. (2019). *Council Recommendation on 'Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults'. Taking stock of implementation measures*. Accessed December 5, 2019, from https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/implementation-report-upskilling-pathways_en

European Commission. (2020). *Education and training in the EU: Where do we stand?* Accessed April 16, 2024, from https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2020/en/

European Commission. (2023a). *Report from the Commission to the Council. Evaluation of the Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for adults*. Accessed November 27, 2023, from https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AJOC_2016_484_R_0001

European Commission. (2023b). *Education and Training Monitor 2024. Monitor toolbox. Adult learning*. Accessed April 11, 2023, from https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2022/en/monitor-toolbox/adult-learning.html

European Commission. (2023c). *Education and Training Monitor 2023*. Accessed April 12, 2024, from https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2023/en/monitor-toolbox/themes/school-education/early-school-leaving.html

European Commission/Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. (2012). *Education and training monitor 2012*. Accessed March 22, 2024, from https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/51172

Eurostat. (2023a). *Education and training in the EU-facts and figures*. Accessed April 11 and July 6-7, 2023, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Education_and_training_in_the_EU_-_facts_and_figures

Eurostat. (2023b). *Tertiary educational attainment by sex*. Accessed April 11 and July 6-7, 2023, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_04_20/default/bar?lang=en

Eurostat. (2023c). *At least upper secondary educational attainment, age group 25-64 by sex*. Accessed April 11 and July 6-7, 2023, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00065/default/bar?lang=en

Eurostat. (2023d). *At most lower secondary educational attainment by age*. Accessed April 11 and July 6-7, 2023, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00197/default/bar?lang=en

Eurostat. (2023e). *Adult participation in learning in the past four weeks by sex*. Accessed July 6-7, 2023, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_04_60/default/bar?lang=en&category=t_educ.t_educ_part

Eurostat. (2023f). *Population by educational attainment level, sex and age (%) - main indicators*. Accessed July 6-7, 2023, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/edat_lfse_03/default/bar?lang=en

Eurostat. (2023g). *Participation rate in education and training (last 4 weeks) by sex and age*. Accessed July 6-7, 2023, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/trng_lfs_01/default/bar?lang=en

Eurostat. (2023h). *Educational attainment statistics*. Accessed July 7, 2023, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Educational_attainment_statistics

Eurostat. (2024). *Adult participation in learning in the past four weeks by sex (sdg_04_60). ESMS Indicator Profile (ESMS-IP)*. Accessed February 8, 2025, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/en/sdg_04_60_esmsip2.htm#coverage_comparability1711102721452

Field, J. (2000). *Lifelong learning and the new educational order*. Trentham Books.

Fragoso, A., & Fonseca, J. (2022). Combating ageism through adult education and learning. *Social Sciences*, *11*(3), 110. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11030110

Frias, M., Alcoforado, L., & Cordeiro, A. (2022). Młodzież NEET – Portret „stanu zawieszenia". Codzienne czynności i postrzeganie obecnego momentu w perspektywie życia [Young NEETs – A portrait of a 'holding pattern'. Daily activities and perceptions of the current moment in life]. *Studia Poradoznawcze/Journal of Counsellogy, 11*. https://doi.org/10.34862/sp.2022.4

Govekar Okoliš, M. (2024). Development of Adult Education and Andragogy in Slovenia. *Studies in Adult Education and Learning, 30*(1), 53-83/85. https://doi.org/10.4312/as/13500

Grek, S., & Lawn, M. (2009). A short history of Europeanizing education. *European Education*, *41*(1), 32-54, https://doi.org/10.2753/EUE1056-4934410102

Grek, S., & Russell, I. (2024). Beyond Bologna? Infrastructuring quality in European higher education. *European Educational Research Journal*, *23*(2), 215-236. https://doi.org/10.1177/14749041231170518

Holford, J., & Milana, M. (2014). Introduction: European adult education policy in question. In M. Milana, & J. Holford (Eds.) *Adult education policy and the European Union: Theoretical and methodological perspectives* (pp. 1-13). Sense Publishers.

Ilieva-Trichkova, P., & Boyadjieva, P. (2024). Bounded advantages of higher education regarding young adults' participation in nonformal education. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *15*(2), 123-140. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.4433

King, R. (2019). New migration dynamics on the South-Western periphery of Europe: Theoretical reflections on the Portuguese case. In C. Pereira, & J. Azevedo (Eds.), *New and old routes of Portuguese emigration: Uncertain futures at the periphery of Europe* (pp. 267-281). SpringerOpen.

Klatt, G. (2023). Resisting Europeanisation: Poland's education policy and its impact on the European Education Area. *European Educational Research Journal*, *23*(4), 561-577. https://doi.org/10.1177/14749041231155219

Laval, C., & Weber, L. (Eds.) (2002). *Le nouvel ordre éducatif mondial: OMC, Banque Mondial, OCDE, Commission Européenne* [The new world education order: WTO, World Bank, OECD, European Commission]. Nouveaux Regards/Syllepse.

Lawn, M., & Nóvoa, A. (Eds.) (2005). *L'Europe réinventée: regards critiques sur l'espace européen de l'éducation* [Europe reinvented: Critical views on the European education area]. L'Harmattan.

Lima, L. C. (2007). *Educação ao longo da vida: entre a mão direita e a mão esquerda de Miró* [Lifelong education: Between Miró's right and left hands]. Cortez.

Lima, L. C., & Guimarães, P. (2012). *Percursos educativos e vidas de adultos: reconhecimento, validação e certificação de competências numa associação de desenvolvimento local* [Educational pathways and adult lives: Recognition, validation and certification of competences in a development association]. UEA-UM/ATAHCA.

Lima, L. C., & Guimarães, P. (2018). Lógicas políticas da educação de adultos em Portugal [Policy perspectives on adult education in Portugal]. *Cadernos de Pesquisa*, *48(*168), 600-623. https://doi.org/10.1590/198053144926

Lukáč, M., & Lukáčová, S. (2024). Second chance in vocational education and training of adults in Slovakia: Second or wasted chance? *International Journal for Research in Vocational Education and Training*, *11*(1), 33-54. https://doi.org/10.13152/IJRVET.11.1.2

Martins, S., Mauritti, R., Nunes, N., Romão, A. L., & da Costa, A. F. (2016). A educação ainda é importante para a mobilidade social? Uma perspetiva das desigualdades educacionais da Europa do Sul no contexto europeu [Is education still important to social mobility? A perspective of educational inequalities in Southern Europe in the European context]. *Revista Portuguesa de Educação*, *29*(2), 261-285. https://doi.org/10.21814/rpe.7920

Mauritti, R., Nunes, N., Alves, J. E., & Diogo, F. (2019). Desigualdades sociais e desenvolvimento em Portugal: um olhar à escala regional e aos territórios de baixa densidade [Social inequalities and development in Portugal: A look at the regional scale and the low-density territories]. *Sociologia Online*, *19*, 102-126. http://doi.org/10.30553/sociologiaonline.2019.19.5

Meilland, C. (2023). France et Danemark: deux modèles de formation professionnelle continue aux impacts différenciés? [France and Denmark: Two models of continuing vocational training with different impacts?] *Action Publique. Recherche et Pratiques*, *16*(1), 16-28. https://doi.org/10.3917/aprp.016.0016

Melo, A. (2004). A ausência de uma política de educação de adultos como forma de controle social e alguns processos de resistência [The absence of an adult education policy as a form of social control and some processes of resistance]. *Fénix – Revista Pernambucana de Educação Popular e de Educação de Adultos*, *3*(3), 17-26.

Melo, A. (2017). *Falta cumprir a educação de adultos em Portugal* [Adult education in Portugal still lacks fulfilment]. Lisboa: Comissão de Educação e Ciência da Assembleia da República. Accessed October 5, 2017, from https://www.parlamento.pt/ActividadeParlamentar/Paginas/DetalheEvento.aspx?BID=105466

Melo, A., Lima, L. C., & Almeida, M. (2002). *Novas políticas de educação e formação de adultos* [New policies for adult education and training]. Agência Nacional de Educação e Formação de Adultos (ANEFA).

Merrill, B., Galimberti, A., & Fragoso, A. (2024). Editorial: Reflecting back to the past, present and future: The changing nature of research on access, learning careers and identity. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, 15*(1), 7-11. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.5186

Mikulec, B., & Guimarães, P. (2023). The OECD solutionism and mythologies in adult education policy: Skills strategies in Portugal and Slovenia. *Studies in Continuing Education*, *45*(3), 324-343. https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2022.2092090

Mikulec, B., & Krašovec, S. J. (2016). Marketising Slovene adult education policies and practices using mechanisms of the Europeanisation of education. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *7*(2), 151-170. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela9081

Milana, M., & Mikulec, B. (2023). Setting the new European agenda for adult learning 2021-2030: Political mobilisation and the influence of advocacy coalitions. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *14*(2), 205-228. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.4637

Normand, R. (2021). The new European political arithmetic of inequalities in education: A history of the present. *Social Inclusion*, *9*(3), 361-371. https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v9i3.4339

Nóvoa, A. (2005). *Evidentemente: histórias da educação* [Evidently: Histories of education]. Asa.

Ostrouch-Kamińska, J., Vieira, C. C., & Merrill, B. (2021). Gender sensitive research in adult education: Looking back and looking forward to explore what is and what is missing in the research agenda. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *12*(2), 129-133. https://doi.org/10.3384//rela.2000-7426.3684

Radaelli, C. (2000). Whither Europeanization? Concept stretching and substantive change. *European Integration online Papers (EIoP) 4*(8). Accessed September 18, 2014, from http://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/2000-008a.htm

Ramirez, F., & Boli, J. (1987). The political construction of mass schooling: European origins and worldwide institutionalization. *Sociology of Education*, *60*(1), 2-17. https://doi.org/10.2307/2112615

Rasmussen, P. (2014a). Adult learning policy in the European commission. In M. Milana, & J. Holford (Eds.), *Adult Education Policy and the European Union* (pp. 17-34). Sense.

Rasmussen, P. (2014b). Lifelong learning policy in two national contexts. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *33*(3), 326-342. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2014.896088

Santos, A. C., & Reis, J. (2018). Portugal: uma semiperiferia reconfigurada [Portugal: A Reconfigurated Semiperiphery]. *e-cadernos CES*, 29, 57-76. https://doi.org/10.4000/eces.3163

Santos, B. S. (1990). *O Estado e a sociedade em Portugal (1974-1988)* [The State and society in Portugal (1974-1988)]. Edições Afrontamento.

Sava, S., & Luştrea, A. (2017). Participation rates in lifelong learning: Why is Romania not so successful? In G. A. Koulaouzides, & K. Popović (Eds.) *Adult education and lifelong learning in Southeastern Europe* (pp. 101-114). Sense Publishers.

Sorensen, T. B., & Eeva, K. (2024). Re-articulating the form of the political: Contemporary education governance in the European Union. Introduction to the Special Issue. *European Educational Research Journal*, *23*(2), 165-177. https://doi.org/10.1177/14749041241231021

Soysal, Y. N., & Strang, D. (1989). Construction of the first mass education systems in Nineteenth-century Europe. *Sociology of Education*, *62*(4), 277-288. https://doi.org/10.2307/2112831

Stoer, S. R. (1994). Construindo a escola democrática através do 'campo da recontextualização pedagógica' [Constructing the democratic school through the 'field of pedagogical recontextualization']. *Educação, Sociedade & Culturas*, 1, 7-27. https://repositorio-aberto.up.pt/bitstream/10216/6695/2/83370.pdf

Teodoro, A. (2001). Organizações internacionais e políticas educativas nacionais: a emergência de novas formas de regulação transnacional ou uma globalização de baixa intensidade [International organisations and national education policies: The emergence of new forms of transnational regulation or low-intensity globalisation]. In S. R. Stoer, L. Cortesão, & J. A. Correia (Eds.). *Da crise da educação à 'educação' da crise: educação e a transnacionalização dos mecanismos de regulação social* (pp. 125-161). Edições Afrontamento.

Teodoro, A. (2022). O PISA e as limitações e riscos de um programa de governação global da OCDE [PISA and the limitations and risks of an OECD global governance programme]. *Revista Lusófona de Educação*, 56, 45-64. https://revistas.ulusofona.pt/index.php/rleducacao/article/view/8604

Tuparevska, E., Santibáñez, R., & Solabarrieta, J. (2020). Equity and social exclusion measures in EU lifelong learning policies. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *39*(1), 5-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2019.1689435

Valente, A. C., & Wochnik, M. (2008). Novas tendências na educação e formação profissional (EFP) na Europa: A convergência como uma driving force na reforma dos sistemas de EFP nacionais? O caso Português [New trends in vocational education and training (VET) in Europe: Convergence as a driving force for the reform of national VET Systems? The Portuguese case]. *Working Papers Portugal*, Lisboa. Accessed October 5, 2019, from http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/lissabon/06863-20220207.pdf

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.

RELA is published on behalf of the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA).

www.rela.ep.liu.se

www.esrea.org

ISSN 2000-7426