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CONCLUSION

The starting point for this volume was the growing importance – but limited exploration – of the European Union's (EU) policy role in adult education. While the authors and editors have no single view, the book does seek to promote a particular perspective: the need to problematise, both theoretically and methodologically, the features that characterise the EU's role in adult education policy. The starting point for most of the chapters has been an historical perspective on the growing number and density of the strands that connect the EU to adult education, in order to reveal the broader socio-political conditions under which the EU and its member states concurrently gain and lose power in this field of action. Against this background, this volume has also questioned the political apparatus that emerges from the power relations between the EU and member states – that is to say the lifelong learning regime, of which adult education is now part – both ideologically and at the level of practice. It has also offered some suggestions on how research on the effect of the relations between the EU and member states on the government of adult education can be carried forward.

In this final chapter we draw together the main features of the arguments presented, and highlight what appear to us to be shared understandings across the diverse approaches and perspectives of our contributors: matters which we believe may be valuable when considering adult education policy and issues within the European region. We then turn to methodological challenges and insights, drawing together – from across the foregoing chapters – criticisms and suggestions which we offer to adult education policy researchers for consideration, application, development and further exploration.

REGIONAL TRANSNATIONALISM IN ADULT EDUCATION

At the most general level, all contributors to this volume share a presumption that adult education, although implemented nationally, can no longer be understood as a policy concern which is delimited by the nation-state. Well-established fields of theoretical and empirical research on global education (e.g., Ball, 2012; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) or European education (e.g., Dale & Robertson 2009; Saar, Ure & Holford, 2013) suggest that governance in education has surpassed the traditional operation of national governments in scope and way of working.

When we restrict our attention to the European region, we see that governance is intimately connected to the creation, development and future prospects of a common European community, and its operating institutions. Analysis and diagnosis of the

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European communitarian 'project' abound (e.g. Beck, 2013; Giddens, 2006, 2013), mostly revolving around basic but at the same time complex questions such as: Why did it start? How has it grown and expanded? What problems has it encountered? How can it move forward? Yet many of these analyses continue to ignore how this wider context of evolution, and sometimes uncertainty, has impacted on the values and grammar of education, and specifically on the education of European citizens and others living on European soil, who stand outside national education systems.

Within the field of adult education growing attention has been directed to this issue (e.g., Lima & Guimaraes 2011), unpacking how adult education policy, and its inclusion within an encompassing lifelong learning regime (see Fejes, this volume; Normand & Pacheco, this volume), are intrinsically related to the very existence and persistence of the EU as a competitive actor within the world system. Uncovering the reasons and mechanisms that sustain regional transnationalism in adult education constitutes a pre-requisite to broadening our understanding of what enables European citizens to engage in learning – or precludes them from doing so.

For decades collaborative efforts across member states, generally supported by EU programmes, have led to the implementation of initiatives for the education of adults. These initiatives – undertaken by national and local governments, academia, and professional organisations, to mention just a few – were aimed at both adult citizens of member states and their counterparts from other European countries. However, adult education as such represents a relatively new element of the policies generated in Brussels (see Mohorčič Špolar & Holford, this volume), and an element on which regional transnationalism has only lately begun to exert power. We return to this issue below. Here we draw attention to the steps which occurred (see Rasmussen, this volume). Adult education has been conceptualised at the European level predominantly in terms of vocational training or training for the job. Accordingly, it has received growing attention in those divisions of the European Commission charged with employment and social inclusion. In education and training, new conditions for EU-member state relations (Phillips & Ertl 2003; Nóvoa & Lawn 2002) were created with the Lisbon process. In the process, adult education has gained recognition as a political object for regional transnationalism.

CHANGES IN THE MEANS FOR EXERTING POLICY WILL

The contributions to this volume also share an awareness of a radical transformation in the means by which policy will is exerted within the European region. This refers primarily to the means through which traditional forms of power – in the hands of national and local governments – regulate and control the diverse dimensions of individuals' lives. But it also denotes the means by which non-governmental political actors contribute to these shifts. While these actors have expanded in number and type under neo-liberal regimes, and the multiple forms of 'liberalisation' that they brought (Ball, 2012; Rhodes, 1997), in this volume attention has been focused on those that operate within the EU as a pooling of national sovereignties.

Particularly prominent in our accounts are the EU's institutions, such as the European Council, the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the sub-national levels of government that participate in these institutions. Much less attention has been given to the business organisations and citizenship associations that operate within and across European national borders (see Klatt, this volume; Milana, this volume).

Drawing on social constructivism, understood in its political science interpretation as an ontology of the relation between agency and structure (see Klatt, this volume), we understand European adult education policy as the emergent outcome of continuing interactions among European diplomats, officials, politicians, citizens and, most importantly, member states as politically or technically represented. The channels through which these interactions occur are multi-faceted. The most powerful are undoubtedly deeply intertwined within the principal EU institutions – institutions that still rely significantly, though no longer exclusively, on the mechanisms and procedures of 'hard' governance.

Accordingly, the European Council initiates, thanks to the Conclusions of its Summits – the result of negotiations and bargaining between heads of state or government. The Council of Ministers holds decision-making powers that affect implementation of the Council's initiatives in the field of education and training, through negotiations with national governments' representatives. The European Commission initiates legislation, controls national implementation of community decisions, and holds responsibility for agenda-setting at regional level. Finally, the European Parliament holds legislative power, yet only in agreement with the European Council and on the basis of proposals by the European Commission.

As several contributors to this volume highlight, however, since the start of the present century these institutions have increased their power by expanding their modes of operation to include 'soft' governance instruments, and in particular through the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). The OMC facilitates networking between national officials and other interest groups, like social partners and non-governmental organisations on specific issues of concern. This has significantly extended the power of the European Commission in particular, while contributing to the emergence of monitoring and controlling mechanisms at European level. While attention to the working of the OMC in education and training has grown exponentially over the years (e.g., Borras & Jacobsson, 2004), the impact of the OMC on regional inasmuch as national adult education policy is still underexplored.

Within this scenario, a major claim made in the present volume is that EU member states have not – as much of the literature on Europeanisation seems to assume (cf. Lawn & Grek, 2012) – 'lost' their sovereign power to regulate and control adult education. On the contrary, member states have occupied new interstices for political negotiations and bargaining within Europe. This is not to say, however, that their political power is limited to that embodied in heads of states, government officials and civil servants, or that such influence is necessarily the result of coherent national approaches to adult education.

THE MORAL IMPERATIVES OF CAPITALISM

An additional point of convergence across our contributions is that adult education can no longer be taken to be a separate or marginal area of policy concern. Within the EU's political realm, adult education is intimately intertwined in lifelong learning ideologies, agendas and regimes. As several chapters show, it is precisely this intimate relationship that 'justifies', and indeed expands, a tendency in European thinking and political initiatives to equate adult education with education for employability and economic competitiveness. In our opinion this underplays, among others, adult education's potential for moral, political and social development at either personal or community level; both have even more potential in times of worsening of living conditions for great sections of the European population, and growing discontent with neo-liberal regimes.

These shared views, however, open up a spectrum of possible approaches for adult education policy researchers to interrogate the politics of lifelong learning and its ethical dimensions, or question the values it carries, its regulatory functions, and its effects on people's lives.

In this volume we have given considerable attention to one particular strand of scholarly work that approaches lifelong learning and the education of adults from a governmentality perspective (e.g. Fejes, this volume; Normand & Pacheco, this volume). This work looks at lifelong learning as a 'regime of practice' that is constituted by a range of conceptual, institutional and discursive elements. When combined with specific scientific knowledge and propositions about learning, these frame both the objects and subjects of learning (see Fejes, this volume). Accordingly, a European regime of lifelong learning not only conditions what is understood as relevant knowledge that citizens shall acquire, but also creates new pockets of exclusion among European citizens who are unwilling or incapable to acquire such knowledge.

In other words, citizens living within Europe are governed by framing procedures such as the setting of national and international standards, classifications and indicators; examples are those emerging from the implementation of Education and Training 2020, or the Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competences (PIAAC). Such forms of governmentality re-frame traditional relations between public and private, and more specifically, between state and market, as well as the relationships between formal, non-formal and informal education and learning opportunities and experiences. Several scholars see this as the result of a self-evident trend in lifelong learning ideologies, agendas and regimes that builds on their liberal elements – such as a technocratic approach to knowledge, and a faith in individual competition for the reproduction of elites. In their chapter, Normand and Pacheco develop this approach by pointing to three 'horizons of justice' that feed into the politics of lifelong learning: the maintenance of citizens' productive capacities, the redistribution of resources for education (and learning), and the determination of merits for the selection of elites.

What should be of special concern to adult education policy researchers are the principles of justice embedded in contemporary understandings of the 'common

good'. While we believe that governmentality studies are not the only approach, they constitute a powerful contribution. Quite apart from their intrinsic value, we believe they have played a significant role in raising awareness of the breadth and depth of contemporary European lifelong learning politics.

CRITICALITIES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Taken together we hope the chapters above raise awareness of the complex relations between European polity, politics and policy in adult education; this poses several challenges for those adult education policy researchers whose main focus is on the European region or European nations and localities.

One critical dimension is how to move towards a theory of European governance in adult education – or rather, towards a complex theoretical apparatus that can capture conceptually the dialogical relation between national and supranational levels as they play out within the European region. A second critical dimension lies in the operationalisation of this theoretical apparatus in ways that can fruitfully guide empirical exploration and analysis – not at supranational or national level, but rather in the interstices where these levels meet. This points to a third critical dimension: the need to identify primary and secondary units of analysis, in ways that reproduce neither 'methodological nationalism' (Smith 1983, Wimmer & Glick Shiller 2002) – the assumption of EU member states as the 'natural' unit of analysis – nor generate some kind of 'methodological regionalism' by postulating the European Union as the conventional unit of analysis.

None of our contributions has explicitly engaged with these criticalities. Yet across the foregoing chapters several suggestions emerge for further exploration and to better 'unpack' the working of European adult education policy and its ultimate effects on people.

By engaging with conceptual tools and analytical insights from political and social sciences, some authors suggest conceptualising adult education as one of the building blocks of a socio-political communitarian project (see Rasmussen, this volume), which can question the specific cause it serves, how it does so (Normand & Pacheco, this volume), and what its social effects might be (Fejes, this volume). Other authors suggest conceptualising adult education as one among many battlefields where power relations and positions are constituted, maintained or modified through continuing negotiations and bargaining among political actors (Klatt, this volume). This in turn directs our attention towards those who participate in these negotiations, and their room for manoeuvre; and to question the interests at stake (Milana, this volume). It also raises the question of whether the specific social needs of those who reside within Europe's sovereign member states find concrete answers (Koutidou, this volume).

Yet from a methodological viewpoint, while discourse analysis and the analysis of secondary data, which abound in adult education policy analysis, will continue to provide viable strategies to investigate some of the issues at stake, more careful consideration of the philosophy that guides the research process is needed. Our contributors have given emphasis to methodological explorations and proposals that

explicitly engage with the challenge of overcoming methodological nationalism, and seek to connect structure and agency (Cort, this volume) or the supranational and national scales (Koutidou, this volume) in the study of European policy.

We are conscious that many other gaps (and openings) remain in the path of adult education policy researchers who focus on Europe. Our hope is that this book will encourage and stimulate further the interdisciplinary dialogue and exchange which is the essential foundation for meaningful empirical scholarship in this field.

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