

The Impact of the European Policies on the New Skills for the New Jobs

Rosario Sergio Maniscalco
Department of Education, University of Turku
Assistentinkatu 5, 20014 Turku, Finland
Tel: 358-2-333-8736 E-mail: rosman@utu.fi

Abstract

In the light of the recent economic downturn, but also because of the ageing work force in Europe, the increased labor market's flexibility and dynamics, many governments have recently focused their educational policies on how adult learners may adapt to the new knowledge-based economy and be competitive. Nevertheless, the way the European Union is shaping the adult learners' upskilling seems to be giving more emphasis to basic and hard skills to train people to the new jobs of the modern economy rather than soft skills and competences for an active European citizenship.

The aim of this research is to investigate how skill standards are weighted in the EU official statements, to show the difficulties of implementation of the European Adult skills policy recommendations in the Member States by analyzing the nature of the obstacles they encounter, eventually extending such empirical evidence to the whole Open Method of Coordination in the Adult Learning sector.

Keywords: Adult learning, Adult education, Lifelong learning, Soft skills, European open method of coordination

1. Research dimension and Rationale

In March 2000, the European leaders committed to the objective of making Europe “the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth, with more and better jobs, greater social cohesion and respect for the environment” (Note 1), and launched the so-called “Lisbon strategy” either “Lisbon process” of reforming the European education systems. This very ambitious purpose, expressed in such strong and urgent terms, was intended to be the European response to a set of new challenges that the world was going to face in the new millennium.

To better understand the deeper meaning of that commitment, it can be helpful to pin down some of the keywords that could explain the shared challenges it implicitly contains: Europe, world, economy, sustainability, competitiveness, knowledge, growth, social cohesion. The socio-economic background of the Lisbon statement was a sum of several challenges (Note 2):

- *economic challenge*: shift to a knowledge-based economy, knowledge is the key for the economic growth;
- *global challenge*: climate change, energy, pollution, water, health, safety – need for prompt sustainable responses;
- *demographic and social challenges*: growing population worldwide, increasing immigration, need for development of innovative social services;
- *technological change*: cumulative growth and spread of knowledge and information, ICTs – information and communication technologies creating new ways of interaction, creative industries.

The EU leaders then, at the European Council in Lisbon, set up the “Lisbon agenda” and fixed the main objectives to achieve by 2010. In May 5, 2003 the Council of the European Ministers of Education also approved the 5 Reference Levels of the European Performance (better known as “benchmarks”) and a set 29 indicators to monitor the effectiveness of the Lisbon strategy, mostly based on policies to encourage investment in knowledge.

But if the declared purpose of the commitment of the EU countries in 2000 was clear enough, a number of more specific issues that the Member States were aware they had to tackle in the following years were eventually the main driving forces that led to that decision:

- the ageing population in the Western countries (Europe the oldest population) meant that young people and new talents' supply for labour market were decreasing, with negative effects on economic growth from the point of view of the sustainability;
- the increase of competitiveness in the economic system implied more dynamics and flexibility in the labour markets;
- as a consequence, more and older people were in need for lifelong learning.

The challenge for education policy-makers and for educators in general, in the light of the above-mentioned demands, was indeed to review learning curricula and pedagogies which inevitably called for the evaluation of the educational reforms. But, already six years after, a report by the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics (LSE, 2006) highlighted that progress had been poor. In fact, the United States had significantly higher productivity than the European average. US GDP per hour was over 15% higher than Europe's; and US GDP per capita was over 30% higher. From the end of the Second World War until the mid-1990s, Europe was catching up with US levels of productivity. But since then, US productivity growth has been faster than in Europe.

In 2000, when the EU launched the Lisbon agenda, the challenge was to stimulate innovation as a major route to reaching the goal. In particular, the EU set the "Barcelona target" of increasing research and development (R&D) to 3% of GDP by 2010. Although the numerical target for R&D makes little economic sense, the emphasis on innovation as a route to growth is relevant. The cost of patenting in Europe is about five times the cost of patenting in the United States. The "brain drain" from the EU to the United States - because of better research opportunities and higher wages - is still a significant phenomenon. The Lisbon agenda's aim of reversing this trend has not materialised. While according to the 5th European benchmark, adult learners participating in lifelong learning should reach 12.5% by 2010, an official report by the European Commission (2008a) displayed that in 2007 the participation was still under 10% (Note 3) and the percentage would hardly increase significantly in the following three years (Note 4). Definitely, the EU had lost its chance to realise the Lisbon objectives by the fixed deadline.

A political debate on the benchmarks and the Lisbon targets occurred between the EU and the Member States to establish whether they were realistic and, if so, what kind of difficulties the National governments encountered in implementing the European education policies. A "shared" admission (Note 5) of the excessive ambition in fixing the Lisbon objectives in the political tables was then followed by a number of proposals for the adjustments to make in the EU policy for E&T and Lifelong Learning.

The work force being crucial in this process, the European Commission called on the Member States to promote adult learning (Note 6) and to place it firmly on their political agendas by adopting in October 2006 the Communication *It is never too late to learn* (EC, 2006c), setting out the general approach to needs and developments in the adult learning sector, and in September 2007 through the Communication *It is always good time to learn* (EC, 2007b), launching the "Action Plan for Adult Learning" (APAL). The Action Plan was intended to help removing the barriers that prevent adults from engaging in learning activities, and to improve the quality and efficiency of the adult learning sector according to two main principles:

- "one step up", i.e. the increase of the chances for obtaining a higher level of qualification;
- assessment of previous skills for a better and more efficient recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The European Commission complemented this initiative with a call to ensure adequate levels of investment in, and better monitoring of, the adult learning sector. Both Communications were afterwards reinforced by the Conclusions of the Council in 2008 (EU, 2008). The same year, in the sector of the Adult Education, the European Commission decided to establish a "Working Group on the implementation of the Action Plan on Adult Learning" in order to provide and support the Commission's services with policy advice and assistance in implementing the APAL, and with the clear mandate towards attaining the objectives set out in the Work Programme. The activities of the working group were to be guided by the actions set out in the Action Plan itself and by the actions proposed in the Council Conclusions and the Resolution of the European Parliament, and supported by the secretariat of the group (from the DG EAC of the Commission) and five Focus Groups, centred around the five Key Actions (Note 7) contained in the Action Plan. Moreover, a research working group was to underpin this work in due course.

On the other hand, several studies showing that the labour market is becoming more and more demanding for the workers in terms of increasing labour market's flexibility, dynamics and high-qualification job rate (Note 8), but

also in the perspective of “anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs”, the Council of the EU adopted a Resolution focusing on the “New Skills for the New Jobs” (EU, 2007), taking into account the workers’ skills and competences in the modern economy. This way, the EU launched a parallel political stream whose target was also *adult learners*. Indeed, in the contemporary economy soft skills are widely recognised as key to making businesses more profitable and better places to work. Increasingly, companies are not just assessing their current staff and future recruits merely on their business skills. They are now assessing them on a whole host of soft skills and competences around how well they relate and communicate to others.

Hence, the growing interest of the education policy-makers for the soft skills in lifelong learning, translated into a series of documents, like the Recommendation of 2006 on the Key Competences (EU, 2006b), that were subsequently more or less integrated in the education policies through the EU Open Method of Coordination in Education & Training Work Programme 2020, in Vocational Education and Training (VET), partially in the *Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013* and in the European Social Fund. Also the occurrence of the words *innovation* and *creativity* increased significantly during the last years: the “Innovation Strategy for E&T” (Note 9) by OECD, the “Broad-based Innovation Strategy for the EU” by the EU (EC, 2006a), the Knowledge Triangle, they all included “innovation” as one of the key elements of the modern educational reforming. The European Union further affirmed the importance of both and made of 2009 the “European Year of Creativity and Innovation”.

A substantial delay in this process came distinctly from the economic downturn that hit the whole world’s economic system, especially the 1st half of the year 2009, followed by a “social crisis” concerning in particular the labor market during the second part of the same year until 2010. While the EU’s objective was to foster the creation of learning environments that could allow the development and promotion of all the necessary “new skills for the new jobs” and strike a good balance between hard and soft skills, the European education systems were only measuring basic skills, literacy and numeracy, but not at all creativity. Hence, the implementation of this “inspired revolution” in the Member States’ education policies has been so far very limited. This study has emerged as a response to these instances.

2. Theoretical framework

According to the most recent reports by OECD (2003, 2006) and Eurostat (EC, 2009b) on the demography of the Western countries, the percentage of the population that is 65 years or older is rising in all the OECD and EU Member States and is expected to continue doing so. The number of inactive elderly as a ratio of the numbers in the total labour force is also increasing throughout EU countries. All European countries will experience a sharp increase in the dependency ratio over the period 2020 to 2050, projected to more than double from its current level. The European Commission (2010, p. 44) has recently estimated that over the next 30 years the number of younger Europeans (up to 24 years) will fall by 15%, while the median age is projected to rise from 40.4 years to 47.9 years in 2060.

Population ageing arises from two demographic effects: increasing longevity and declining fertility. The first one raises the average age of the population by increasing the numbers of surviving older people, while the second one reduces the number of babies, and - as the effect continues - the number of younger people in general also reduce. The socio-economic implications are considerable. Older people often have higher accumulated savings per head than younger people, but may be spending less on consumer goods. Depending on the age ranges at which the changes occur, an ageing population may thus result in lower interest rates and the economic benefits of lower inflation. Population ageing also increases some categories of expenditure, including some from public finances. The largest area of expenditure in many countries is now health care, whose cost is likely to increase dramatically as the population ages. This would present governments with hard choices between higher taxes, including a possible reweighing of tax from earnings to consumption, and a reduced government role in providing health care.

Social security systems have also begun to face serious difficulties. Pension systems are as well experiencing sustainability problems due to the increased longevity. The extension of the pension period is not yet often paired with an extension of the active labour period or a rise in pension contributions, resulting in a decline of replacement ratios. In recent years, many countries have adopted policies to strengthen the financial sustainability of pension systems, although the challenges regarding pension adequacy remain.

In January 2010, at the Lisbon agenda’s deadline, the European Commission (2010, p. 4) presented the following key data about the EU ageing population and education:

- The employment rate of older workers is projected to increase sharply from 40% in 2004 for the EU25 to 47% by 2010 and 59% in 2025.

- In 2007, there were almost 80 million low-skilled workers in the EU (nearly 30% of the adult population).
- By 2010 only 15% of the newly created jobs will be for those with low skills, and 50% of new jobs will require higher education level qualifications.
- Around 30% of adult population in the EU still have at most lower secondary education.
- Adult (age 25-64) participation in lifelong learning fails to increase. Compared with the benchmark goal of 12.5% participation in lifelong learning by 2010, the average rate in 2008 was 9.5%.
- More than one-third (35.7%) of the EU's population aged 25-64 participated in formal or non-formal learning. The large majority took part to non-formal education and training. About 6% participated in formal education.
- Over 80% of the non-formal activities are job-related. Employers and non-formal educational institutions provide half of the total non-formal activities.
- More than 70% of people with low levels of education as well as those in low-skilled blue collar professions do not participate in formal or non-formal education and training.

These trends contribute, indeed, to the wide recognition of the value of *adult learning* to respond to the labor market future needs. Adult Education (AE) is a specific reality which still finds no clear position in the education policies; it is sometimes confused with other branches also because of the terminology, which varies from country to country and from institution to institution (Eurydice, 2007), and is very often associated to the concept of *human capital* management. The use of the term "human capital" in the modern (neoclassical economic) academic literature dates back to Becker's book entitled *Human Capital* (1964), which became a scientific reference for many years. According to Becker, the investment in human capital (via education, training, medical treatment) and the outputs depend partly on the rate of return on the human capital owned. Thus, *human capital* is a means of production, into which additional investment yields additional output. More recent growth theories see human capital as important growth factor, while further research show its relevance for democracy and the society.

Thirty years later, somewhat integrating the Human Capital theory, Nico Stehr (1994) introduced the definition of *Knowledge Societies* as a specific model of societies whose characteristic is that knowledge forms a major component of any human activity. Economic, social, cultural, and all other human activities become dependent on a huge volume of knowledge and information. In a knowledge society, *knowledge* becomes a major creative force. With current technologies, in fact, the knowledge societies are not constrained by geographic proximity: the modern technology offers many more possibilities for sharing, archiving and retrieving knowledge. Finally, overcoming the Human Capital theory, knowledge has become the most important *capital* in the present age, and hence the success of any society lies in investing and using it in the most profitable way.

To summarize, the main elements that have determined the launch of specific Education Policies for adult learners by the EU are the demographic challenge of the European *ageing population*, but also the influence of theories such as the *Human Capital's* and the *Knowledge Societies'*. The first theory influenced the launch of the European Commission's Adult Learning Action Plan, the second is the background of the EU "New Skills for the New Jobs" policy statement (EU, 2007). In 2003, the OECD (2003, p. 3) remarked: "Adult learning has taken on a much higher profile in the last decade, as OECD economies and ageing societies are increasingly *knowledge-based*. High unemployment rates among the unskilled, the increased and recognized importance of *human capital* for economic growth - together with public interest in improving social and personal development - make it necessary to increase learning opportunities for adults within the wider context of lifelong learning."

In fact, education reforms have resulted in a significant shift to a knowledge-based economy where *knowledge* is now regarded as a nation's key resource, while continuous training for the workers and labor flexibility become a *must*. Being flexible and able to adapt to the changing needs of an organization – and to the market of work in general – can qualify as *soft skills*, as do being able to collaborate with others and influence situations through lateral and more creative thinking. Nowadays, the ability to communicate, influence people, motivate and delegate, to deal with differences, multiculturalism and diversity is needed more than ever, and also expresses a proactive citizenship.

In the world of work, *hard skills* normally refer to technical or administrative procedures related to an organization's business. Examples include financial procedures and sales administration, using tools, operating machinery, typing, proficiency with software applications and computer protocols, mathematical ability, safety standards. These skills are typically easy to observe, quantify and measure. They are also easier to train, because most of the time the skill sets are brand new to the learner and no unlearning is involved. By contrast, *soft skills*

are typically more difficult to observe, quantify and measure. Some people make friends easily, for example, which would be considered a valuable soft skill in the world of sales. Others are extremely punctual, or able to make rational decisions under pressure. A person may also have the ability to work with co-workers from other cultures, or learn a new language quickly. These would all be often considered as innate skills. As a matter of fact, soft skills refer to a cluster of qualities, habits, personality traits, attitudes and social graces which everyone possesses in varying degrees, and are needed for everyday life as much as they are needed for work.

The disambiguation of the terminology is actually not straightforward. In 1955, the Harvard Business Review (HBR) published an article by Robert Lee Katz (1955) entitled "Skills of an effective administrator". This article, as Peterson and Van Fleet (2004) point out, is nowadays considered a classic work on managerial skills. Basically, Katz argued that an executive's traits or personality characteristics are not important, but what the executive can accomplish. More specifically, he said that it is a set of *core skills*, which are employed by managers in pursuit of organisational objectives, that is important. According to him, what a manager can accomplish is based on the skills that the manager possesses, where skill is defined the "ability either to perform some specific behavioural task or the ability to perform some specific cognitive process that is functionally related to some particular task" (*ibidem*).

Guy Le Boterf (1995), analogously, has more recently defined the term *competence* in the following way: "La compétence est la mobilisation ou l'activation de plusieurs savoirs, dans une situation et un contexte données" (Note 10), very similar to the one proposed by Sandra Bélier in the *Traité des sciences et des techniques de la Formation* by Philippe Carré and Pierre Caspar (1999): "la compétence permet d'agir et/ou de résoudre des problèmes professionnels de manière satisfaisante dans un contexte particulier, en mobilisant diverses capacités de manière intégrée" (Note 11). In both representations, knowledge, abilities, and behaviours become resources that the individuals can combine, "mobilise" and activate in order to deal effectively with a specific situation, which corresponds to the shift from knowledge-centred approach to learning to the skills- and competence-centred ("savoir" to "savoir faire" and "savoir être" in French language).

As shown through the above examples, very often one term is defined referring to the other and vice-versa. A cross-linguistic analysis makes even more difficult to establish what is competence and what are skills or abilities; in French language, for instance, there is no real distinction, as the scientific literature uses the term *compétence* as an hypernym. Daniel Goleman, on the other hand, introducing the concept of *Emotional Intelligence*, integrates in his definition of "competence" a reflection concerning a basic dichotomy, based on two different interacting spheres: a *Personal Competence* - related to the way we control ourselves - and a *Social Competence*, related to the world and the way we interact with other individuals. In his second book on the issue, *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, Goleman (1996) proposes a more detailed table - a synoptic framework of the soft skills which takes into account the most recent developments in the research field inaugurated with the *Multiple Intelligences Theory* by Howard Gardner (1983, 1993), based on psycho- and sociological principles and assumptions, called "Emotional Competence Framework". The limit of the above-presented research on core skills is, indeed, the target- and domain- oriented approach of the empirical studies carried on. A more "philosophical" evolution of Gardner's theory is actually in his last work, *Five Minds for the Future* (2007), where the Professor from Harvard outlines the specific cognitive abilities that should be sought and cultivated by leaders in the years ahead. They include: the "Disciplinary Mind" (the mastery of major schools of thought, including science, mathematics, and history, and of at least one professional craft), the "Synthesizing Mind" (the ability to integrate ideas from different disciplines or spheres into a coherent whole and to communicate that integration to others), the "Creating Mind" (the capacity to uncover and clarify new problems, questions and phenomena), the "Respectful Mind" (awareness of and appreciation for differences among human beings and human groups), and the "Ethical Mind" (fulfilment of one's responsibilities as a worker and as a citizen).

In any case, the so-called "new basic skills" (Murnane & Levy, 1996) have taken a much higher profile in recent decades, especially since emotional intelligence has been shown to be a key indicator for identifying top performers: from teamwork to team-building, leadership, risk-management, intercultural awareness, problem- and conflict-solving, but also ability to adapt to new workplaces and working environments, capability to diversify and to re-qualify in order to handle new tasks and new responsibilities. Unlike hard skills, which tend to be specific to a certain type of task or activity, soft skills are broadly applicable. It is often said that hard skills provide a job but then soft skills are necessary to keep it.

Yet, despite 2009 was the European year of Creativity and Innovation, the soft skills are still rarely mentioned in the national education policy statements. This inevitably calls for a reflection on the way the European countries are designing new learning curricula for adults.

3. Research questions

A major concern in the European Adult Education policies, as anticipated in the first part of this document, is the ageing work force in Europe: adults are becoming an important and target to urgently focus on. Though, whether the EU is designing the adult skills mainly for vocational/professional purposes (as in the above-mentioned Resolution on the New Skills for the New Jobs), many European countries with long tradition in Adult Education and with higher participation rates of adult learners in lifelong learning - the Scandinavian countries for instance - still give more significance to the non-vocational aspects of this kind of educational provision (liberal education, leisure-time learning), investing in the welfare, in the personal fulfillment and well-being of their people.

Moreover, considering that even the *Grundtvig Programme* (The sectorial sub-programme for Adult Education of the European *Lifelong Learning Programme*, which is the best implemented EU measure specifically targeting adult learners, and which integrates quite easily the other European guidelines like the 2006 Recommendation on the Key Competences) has such a minor percentage of *Lifelong Learning Programme* funds (only 4% of the total budget), it is also rather simple to figure out how modest and limited the overall impact of these policies has been up to date. The research questions that follow cannot be but closely bound to this drawback.

3.1 Correlation between National institutional asset and EU policy implementation

How much is the Adult Learning sector regulated at the Member States' level? And what is the dominant institutional asset for the Adult Education? Is it influencing the level of implementation of the EU policies on Adult Education?

3.2 Policy implementation model within Open Method of Coordination (OMC)

Is the bottom-up transfer the most realistic model to explain in what the OMC in the Adult Learning Sector consist in and aim to?

3.3 Nature of the adult skills in the EU education policies

How is the EU shaping the adult learners' upskilling? Is it giving more emphasis to the basic/hard skills in order to train people to the new jobs for the global economy or is it also taking into account the core/soft skills for its citizens in the scope of a better social cohesion (one purpose of the EU political mainstreaming)?

4. Research methodology

The qualitative, step-by-step approach necessary for my research includes a first browse and review of official documentation and relevant literature in order to draw, by content analysis, the overall context of the Adult Education policies at European level, in the reference period 2000-2010 (i.e. the Lisbon agenda timeline) including targets and objectives/road maps up to 2010 but also 2020 (the Lisbon agenda's "extension", whose goals have been fixed during the last years of the first decade by reviewing and adjusting the Lisbon 2010 objectives). Such diachronic preamble allows me, while illustrating the longitudinal background, to identify the key features for the policy discourse, and then to filter out the relevant factors for the following comparative case-oriented steps. The six factors are the following:

1) Reforms in the Adult Learning sector

Factor 1: presence of specific policies or actions undertaken to improve the quality of the adult learning, measurable in terms of "number of reforms/laws promulgated in the AL sector in a given period of time".

2) Transinstitutional Synergies

Factor 2: synergy/systemic involvement in for the implementation of specific AL regulations and European AL policy recommendations, measurable in terms of "presence of transinstitutional synergies (e.g. interministerial working tables).

3) Key Competences and Adult Skills policies implementation

Factor 3: presence of specific policies on adult skills (or at least implementation of the key competences EU recommendation), measurable in terms of "reference of inclusion of the EU recommendations on key competences/reference or New Skills for the New Jobs reference in the Adult Learning curricula (when formalized) - presence of working tables on adult skills/specific statements or frameworks.

4) National regulation of Adult Learning staff

Factor 4: status of adult learning staff/providers: recognition/valorisation, measurable in terms of "presence specific national regulations".

5) Recognition and Validation of Adult skills and competences

Factor 5: stage/level of implementation/use and impact of specific European Tools on Adult Learning (e.g. activities undertaken in the process of validation of recognition of PREVIOUS non-formal and informal learning: EQF), measurable in terms of “presence of an established NQF in the reference country and inclusion in the national calls/quality assurance official statements”.

6) Financing of the Adult Education sector

Factor 6: total expenditure on AE, financial investments/budget trends in Adult Education, measurable in terms of “budgetary relevance, ROI (return of investment)”.

Using the above-described variables, in the next phase of the time- and space-bound case studies I am using use Mill’s Method of Agreement to split a cluster of four EU sample countries into two different geopolitical macro-areas (Finland and Sweden for the Scandinavian countries, Italy and France for the Mediterranean countries) on the basis of the institutional asset’s similarities concerning Adult Education (e.g. specific regulations) in order to investigate, through Mill’s Method of Difference, the phenomenon of interest, i.e. the modest and heterogeneous levels of implementation of European policies in the Adult Learning sector within the four Member States in relation to the topic of the research and within the multi-actors context of the Adult Education.

The critical analysis of the official documents and policy statements, the process tracing of the policy-making itself, together with the series of parallel macro-casual studies carried on should then provide empirical evidence to the theoretical hypotheses and predictions made up to this stage, e.g. the relevance of the soft skills for the AL, the multiple causation (national and supranational) of the outcome of interest, the bottom-up model for the OMC in Adult Education.

5. Expected results

Through this explanatory pattern, relating simultaneously to the supranational level (integration of the EU policies on AE with the other stream - intrinsically targeting adult learners - of the new skills for the new jobs) and to the national level (implementation of the above-mentioned policies in the Member States), it should be possible to eliminate rival explanations and to verify if the causal mechanism corresponds to the theoretically- and evidence-derived expectations and generalizations, coming up with significant answers to the research questions. In fact, I expect to be able to provide considerable substantiation of an interconnection existing between the institutional asset in the reference European countries, in terms of presence/absence of a systemic regulatory framework making it “eager” to absorb supranational guidelines instead of dispersing them into the vacuum created by the fragmentation of institutional competences and concurrence of formal/non-formal AE provision.

6. Preliminary findings

The scarce levels of implementation of the above-described policies in the European countries seem to be connected, at a first glance, to the general weakness of the EU in the field of Education because of the *subsidiarity principle*: the Member States have not transferred this competence to EU, being the Education one critical area of the states’ sovereignty.

As a matter of fact, Adult Education is specifically characterized by its heterogeneity. The provision of Adult Education in the European Member States also covers a wide range of structures, priorities, learning contents, organizational forms, delivery methods, durations and learning outcomes. In particular, the opportunities for integrated learning trajectories are certainly affected by the strong decentralization and fragmentation of the competences and responsibilities in this sector at different levels: often several ministries involved (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour...), in-house or external governmental bodies, Regions/Länder, Provinces/Departments, municipalities, independent Adult Education institutions and so on. At regional level, for example, there is a strong involvement of employers and social partners, even though the workplace and community learning still generally needs to be promoted and reinforced.

Nevertheless, despite the strong effort the European Commission is undertaking in order to create a European framework for Adult Education, the top-down approach is not very well describing what is happening in the reality. When a competence overlap engenders a responsibility deadlock, the institutional gap is normally filled at a lower level. In the Adult Learning sector, a number of actors have produced a large offer of adult education provision, some of excellent quality, some other poorer. Through the *Grundtvig* programme and the different initiatives set up by the European Commission (working groups, peer-learning activities, staff mobility, transfer of innovation, etc.) that express the “liturgy” of the Open Method of Coordination, this know-how, the good (or

bad) practices are supposed to shift from the ground to a higher level in order give the policy-makers knowledge, resources and tools to implement more systemic measures on a beneficiaries' needs basis.

Moreover, a weak integration of the "New Skills for the New Jobs" policies with the Adult learning Action Plan at EU level is quite evident: the former has been used by the educational stakeholders more as a slogan than an instrument to implement better learning curricula at local level. The problem is also that technical and advanced hard skills are more and more often acquired in work-based learning and third sector/non-formal learning. Even the definition of "knowledge economy" - today widely used to quickly describe the nature and dynamics of the modern economy - may lead to a misunderstanding. In actual fact, knowledge has increasingly come to be identified as what is expressed by language (NCM, 2008). The requirements that knowledge can be formulated linguistically has become a necessary element in all assessments of knowledge. Showing that one "knows" has become equivalent to formulating statements that can be verified. Now, the point is that skills are more about what one can "do" with knowledge, and they are normally demonstrated by carrying out a task leading to the desired result. This "shift to the learning outcomes" (CEDEFOP, 2008) is also a reason why traditional formal learning, more oriented on the "propositional knowledge" and focused on the evaluation of contents does not fit with well with the labour market's needs, oriented on "proactive knowledge" and the assessment of tasks performed.

On May 7, 2009 in Prague, In his speech at the European Conference "Innovation and Creativity in the *Lifelong Learning Programme*", Ján Figel' - European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture, and Youth - recalled that "while respecting the spirit of subsidiarity, we should do whatever we can to ensure that education and training feed into the highest European-level policy processes and we need to cooperate and strengthen partnerships among all actors in education and training, especially with businesses, to bring *creativity* and *innovation* into our education and training systems." Also Odile Quentin, Director General for Education, Training, Culture and Youth at the DG Education and Culture of the European Commission, commented on the European Year of Creativity and Innovation 2009 in the light of the economic downturn in the following way: "The crisis makes the input of *skills*, *creativity* and *innovation* into the economy and society even more critical than before. [...] More and more, people in the workplace will need *know-how* and *soft skills*: the ability to think creatively, to organise work independently, to work in teams, to communicate, with strong intercultural, language and ICT skills. If we are to prepare our young people so they can adapt to change, to work in jobs that may not even exist yet, we need to rethink education. We have to focus not on knowledge but on skills – on what we can do with our knowledge" (Note 12).

Translating the two main concepts of the EU Year 2009 of Creativity and Innovation into endogenic resources available to the stakeholders (policy-makers/education providers), the EAEA (2009) has eventually titled its Grundtvig Award 2009 "Creative and innovative ways to overcome barriers to learning". Now, the point is that innovation is about putting new ideas into *action*. Creativity, instead, deals with the *generation* of these new ideas, and is thus a *prerequisite* of innovation.

Apart from the "overuse" of the terms just highlighted, through a brief mimetic convergence, as *buzz-words*, it is possible to assert that the "one step up" principle stated in the Adult Learning Action Plan launched by the European Commission does not take concretely into account a real adult skills development, and both the EU New Skills for the New Jobs statement of 2007 and the 2006 Recommendation on the Key Competences - a set of borrowed definitions and political compromises without systematic scientific grounds (CEDEFOP, 2008) - do not make any clear distinction between basic and soft skills.

7. Conclusions

In 2010, while the European Union devises its new priorities for the post-2010 Lisbon process and update the strategic framework on lifelong learning, a close cooperation between the Commission, the Member States' governments, the social partners and the Centres for Research is needed in order to continue building up the skills of its people and assuring them better perspectives and quality of living, but also to consolidate the progress made to date, and continue modernise what, how, and why people learn. This way only, in a high-rate mutating sector as the Adult Learning's, evidence-based policies can successfully keep the pace and tackle the new challenges, and - most of all - avoid the paradox of "policy-based evidence."

References

Policy official statements and Working Papers: EU, European Commission

EC. (2000). Commission Staff working document SEC(2000)1832 *A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*, Brussels.

- EC. (2001a). Communication from the European Commission COM(2001)678-final, *Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality*, Brussels.
- EC. (2001b). *Second Chance Schools. The results of a European Pilot Project*, European Commission, D.G. EAC.
- EC. (2006a). Communication from the Commission COM(2006)502-final *Putting knowledge into practice: A broad-based innovation strategy for the EU*, Brussels, [Online] Available: europa.eu/legislation_summaries/employment_and_social_policy/growth_and_jobs/i23035_en.htm (Nov. 17, 2009).
- EC. (2006b). Communication from the Commission COM(2006)502-final *Putting knowledge into practice: A broad-based innovation strategy for the EU*, Brussels, [Online] Available: europa.eu/legislation_summaries/employment_and_social_policy/growth_and_jobs/i23035_en.htm (Nov. 17, 2009).
- EC. (2006c). Communication from the Commission COM(2006)614-final *It is never too late to learn*, Brussels.
- EC. (2007a). Commission Staff working document SEC(2007)1098 *Towards more knowledge-based policy and practice in education and training*, Brussels.
- EC. (2007b). Communication from the Commission COM(2007)558-final *It is always good time to learn*, Brussels.
- EC. (2008a). Communication from the European Commission COM(2008)865-final on *An updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training*, Brussels.
- EC. (2008b). Working Document on *Adult Education Policy Developments in the EU Member States*, based on the reports of the members of the Working Group on the implementation of the Adult Learning Action Plan.
- EC. (2008c). Communication from the European Commission COM(2008)868-final on the *New Skills for New Jobs. Anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs*, Brussels.
- EC. (2008d). Commission Staff working document SEC(2008)3058 accompanying the Communication from the European Commission COM(2008)868-final on the *New Skills for New Jobs. Anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs*, Brussels.
- EC. (2009a). Communication from the European Commission COM(2009)180-final *Dealing with the impact of an ageing population in the EU*, Brussels.
- EC. (2009b). *The 2009 Ageing Report: economic and budgetary projections for the EU-27 Member States (2008-2060)*, European Economy, 2:2009, Luxembourg: EU Publications Office.
- EC. (2010). Official Documentation of the EU Conference *Grundvig. A Decade of European Innovation in Adult Learning*, organised by European Commission, 26-28 January 2010, Brussels.
- EU. (2006a). Decision of European Parliament and of the Council of the EU 1720/2006/EC establishing an *Action Programme in the field of Lifelong Learning*, Brussels.
- EU. (2006b). Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of the EU 2006/962/EC on the *Key competences for lifelong learning*, Brussels.
- EU. (2006c). Conclusions of the Council of the EU 2006/C 298/05 on the *Future priorities for enhanced European cooperation on Vocational Education and Training (VET)*, Brussels, [Online] Available: ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/council13832_en.pdf (Nov. 17, 2009).
- EU. (2007). Resolution of the Council of the EU 2007/C 290/01 on the *New skills for new jobs*, Brussels.
- EU. (2008). Conclusions of the Council of the EU on *Adult learning* 2008/C 140/09 (published in the *Official Journal of the European Union* on June 6, 2008), Brussels.
- European bodies and agencies' documents: CEDEFOP, EUROSTAT, Eurydice**
- Caselli G., Egidi V. (1992). *New frontiers in survival: the length and quality of life, Human resources in Europe at the dawn of the 21st century*, Luxembourg: EUROSTAT.
- CEDEFOP. (2005). *Improving lifelong guidance policies and systems. Using common European reference tools*, Brussels.
- CEDEFOP. (2008). *The Shift to Learning Outcomes. Conceptual, Political and Practical Developments in Europe*, Luxembourg.

CEDEFOP. (2009). *Continuity, consolidation and change. Towards a European era of vocational education and training*, Reference series, 73, Brussels.

EUROSTAT. (2005). *Task force Report on Adult Education Survey (AES)*, Luxembourg: European Communities.

Eurydice. (2007). *Non-Vocational Adult Education in Europe. Executive Summary of National Information on Eurybase* (Working Document), Brussels.

Other International and Transnational Organisations' documents

Auer, P., Fortuny, M. (2000). *Ageing of the Labour Force in OECD Countries: Economic and Social Consequences*, Employment paper 2000/2002, Geneva: International Labour Organization.

Dave, R.H. (Ed.) (1976). *Foundations of Lifelong Education*, UNESCO Institute for Education, Pergamon Press.

Delors, J. (1998). *Education for the 21st Century: Issues and Prospects. Contributions to the Work of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century*, Paris: UNESCO.

Delors, J. (1999). *Education: un trésor est caché dedans*, Paris: UNESCO.

EAEA. (2009a). *Trends in Participation in Adult Education in Europe. Selected findings and policy recommendations*, Belgium: EAEA.

EAEA. (2009b). *EAEA Grundtvig Award 2009. Creative and Innovative Ways to overcome Barriers to Learning*.

EF. (1996). *Experience, Skill and Competitiveness. The Implications of an Ageing Population for the Workforce*, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

ITB. (2008). *Eurotrainer: making Lifelong Learning possible*, Bremen: Institut für Technik und Bildung.

Keogh H. (2009). *The State and Development of Adult Learning and Education in Europe, North America and Israel*, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.

NCM. (2008). *Validation of Adults' Proficiency. Fairness in focus*, Swedish National Centre for Mathematics Education.

NCVER. (2003). *Assessing and certifying generic skills. What is happening in vocational education and training?*, Australian National Training Authority.

NIACE. (2007). *Lifelong, life-wide learning: A Commission of Inquiry into an adult learning strategy for economic success, social justice and fulfilment*.

OECD. (2003). *Beyond Rhetoric: Adult Learning Policies and Practices - Highlights*, Paris: OECD. Retrieved Nov. 17, 2009 from www.oecd.org/dataoecd/18/57/18466358.pdf.

OECD. (2006). *Live Longer, Work Longer*, Paris: OECD.

UN. (1993). *World Population Prospects, The 1992 Revision*, New York.

UN. (1993). *Sex and Age Distribution of the World Populations, The 1992 Revision*, New York.

UNESCO. (1999). *Glossary of Adult Learning in Europe*, Adult Education Monographs, Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Education-EAEA.

General bibliography and academic literature

Aiken, L.R. (1995). *Ageing: An Introduction to Gerontology*. Thousands Oaks, CA and London: Sage.

Andrews, M. (1999). The Seductiveness of Agelessness. *Ageing and Society*, 19:4, 301-18.

Arnett, J.J. (1998). Learning to stand alone: The contemporary transition to adulthood in cultural and historical context. *Human Development*, 41, p. 295-315.

Azizi, N., Lasonen, J. (2006). *Education, Training and the Economy. Preparing Young People for a Changing Labour Market*. Jyväskylä: Institute for Educational Research.

Bateman, T., Snell, S.A. (2004). *Management: The New Competitive Landscape*. New York: McGraw-Hill Irwin.

Bay, D., McKeage, K. (2006). Emotional intelligence in undergraduate accounting students: Preliminary assessment. *Accounting Education*, 15(4), p. 439-54.

Becker, G. (1964). *Human Capital. A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with special reference to Education*. Princeton University Press.

- Bigelow, J.D. (1991). *Managerial Skills Development*. Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bloom, B., Mesia, B., Krathwohl, D. (1964). *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. New York: David McKay.
- Bowles, S., Gintis, H. (1975). The Problem with the Human Capital Theory. A Marxian Critique. *The American Economic Review*, 65:2, p. 74-82.
- Boyatzis, R.E. (1982). *The Competent Manager*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Bron Jr, M., Malewski, M. (Eds.) (1995). *Adult Education and Democratic Citizenship I*. Wroclaw University.
- Budd, R. (1967). *Content Analysis of Communications*. New York: Macmillan Company.
- Burke, P. (2005). *History and Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Caselli G., Frova L. (1993). Baisse de la mortalité et vieillissement de la population. *Congrès et Colloques*, 12, Paris: INED.
- Cassady, J.C., M.A. Eissa (Eds.). (2001). *Emotional intelligence: Perspectives on educational and positive psychology*. New York: Peter Lang, 169-184.
- Castells, M. (2002). The Rise of the Network Society. *The Information Age: Economy, Society, Culture*, 1, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Certo, S.G. (2003). *Modern Management*. Prentice-Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ.
- Clark T. (2005). Lifelong, life-wide or life sentence?. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 45:1, 47.
- Coupland, N., Coupland, J. (1993). Discourse of Ageism and Anti-Ageism. *Journal of Ageing Studies*, 7:3, 279-301.
- Davenport, T., Prusak, L. (1998). *Working Knowledge*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Dessler, G. (2004). *Management Principles and Practices for Tomorrow's Leaders*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice-Hall.
- DTI. (2004). *Defining a Strategy for the Direct Assessment of Skills*. Leonardo Da Vinci Project Final Report, Danish Technological Institute, RAND Europe & Skope.
- Duncan, C. (2003). Assessing Anti-Ageism Routes to Older Worker Re-Engagement. *Work, Employment and Society*, 17:1, 101-20.
- EVA, Keizai Doyukai. (2006). *Creative and Aging Societies. Views from Japan and Finland*. Helsinki: Taloustieto.
- Évéquoz, G. (2004). *Les compétences clés*. Liaisons.
- Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. New York: Basic.
- Gardner, H. (1993). *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice*. New York: Basic.
- Gardner, H. (2000). *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century*. New York: Basic.
- Gardner, H. (2007). *Five Minds for the Future*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Gardner, H., Hatch, T. (1989). Multiple Intelligences go to School. *Educational Researcher*, 18, 8.
- George, A., Bennett, A. (2005). *Case Studies and Theory Development in Social Sciences*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Goleman, D. (1996). *Emotional Intelligence*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Goleman, D. (1998). *Working with Emotional Intelligence*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Green, A. (2006). Models of Lifelong Learning and the 'Knowledge Society'. *Compare. A Journal of Comparative Education*, 36:3, 307-25.
- Hanau, C. (1987). *I nuovi vecchi: un confronto internazionale*. Rimini: Maggioli.
- Hendricks, J., Hendricks, C.D. (1977). *Ageing in Mass Society. Myths and Realities*. Cambridge: Winthrop.
- Hoey J. J., Gardner D.C. (1999). *Using Surveys of Alumni and Their Employers to Improve an Institution*. New Directions for Institutional Research, 101/1999, 43-59.
- Kallo J., Rinne R. (Eds.) (2006). *Supranational Regimes and National Education Policies – Encountering Challenge*. Finnish Educational Research Association, Research in Educational Sciences, 24.
- Katz, R.L. (1955). Skills of an effective administrator. *Harvard Business Review*, 33:1, 33-42.

- Katz, R.L. (1974). Skills of an effective administrator. *Harvard Business Review*, 52:5, 90-102.
- Kouzes, J.M., B.Z. Posner. (2002). *Leadership: The Challenge*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Le Boterf, G. (2000). *Construire les compétences individuelles et collectives*. Paris: Les Ed. de l'Organisation.
- Le Boterf, G. (1995). *De la compétence: Essai sur un attracteur étrange*. Paris: Les Ed. de l'Organisation.
- Le Boterf, G. (1997). *Compétence et navigation professionnelle*. Paris: Les Ed. de l'Organisation.
- Leigh, W.A., Deitra H. Lee, Lindquist M.A. (1999). *Soft Skills Training: An Annotated Guide to Selected Programs*. Joint Centre for Political and Economic Studies.
- LSE. (2006). *Boosting Innovation and Productivity Growth in Europe: the hope and the realities of the EU's Lisbon agenda*. The London School of Economics and Political Science, Centre for Economic Performance.
- Lutz W. (1991). *Future Demographic Trends in Europe and North America. What Can We Assume Today?*. London: Academic Press.
- Mahoney, J., Ruschemeyer, D. (Eds.) (2003). *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge University Press.
- Maimon, Z. (1986). Business studies and the development of managerial skills. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 6:1, 83-97.
- Maniscalco, R.S. (2008). La competenza interlinguistica e interculturale per la cittadinanza globale. *Label Lingue Europeo: dialogare premia*, I quaderni LLP, 5, Agenzia Nazionale Scuola, 9-13.
- McLennan, K. (1967). The manager and his job skills. *Academy of Management Journal*, 10:3, 235-45.
- Mill, J.S. (2002). *A System of Logic*. University Press of the Pacific.
- Murnane, R.J., Levy, F. (1996). *Teaching the New Basic Skills. Principles for Educating Children to Thrive in a Changing Economy*. New York: Free Press.
- Nagel, S.S. (Ed.) (1999). *Policy Analysis Methods*. New Science Publishers, Inc.
- Noah H., Eckstein M. (1969). *Towards a Science of Comparative Education*. New York: MacMillan.
- Peterson, T.O., Van Fleet, D.D. (2004). The ongoing legacy of R.L. Katz: An updated typology of management skills. *Management Decision*, 42:10, 1297-1308.
- Radin, B. (2000). *Beyond Machiavelli. Policy Analysis Comes of Age*. Georgetown University Press.
- Rinne R., Heikkinen A., Salo P. (Eds.) (2007). *Adult Education – Liberty, Fraternity, Equality? Nordic Views on Lifelong Learning*. Finnish Educational Research Association, Research in Educational Sciences, 28.
- Rinne R., Olkinuora E., Mäkinen J., Järvinen T., Jauhiainen A. (2008). *Promises and Risks of the Learning Society: The Meanings of Lifelong Learning for Three Finnish Generations*. Studies in the Education of Adults, 40:1, 40-61.
- Schemmann, M., Bron Jr, M. (Eds.) (2001). *Adult Education and Democratic Citizenship IV*. Krakow: Impuls.
- Stehr, N. (1994). *Knowledge Societies*. Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stehr, N. (2001). *The Fragility of Modern Societies. Knowledge and Risk in the Information Age*. Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Suzman R., Willis D., Manton K. (Eds.) (1992). *The oldest old*. Oxford University Press.
- Travers, R. (1969). *An Introduction to Educational Research*. London: Collier-Macmillan.
- Weimer D.L., Vining, A.R. (1991). *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice*. Prentice Hall.
- Whetten, D.A., Cameron, K.S. (1983). Management skills training: a needed addition to the management curriculum. *Organizational Behavior Teaching Journal*, 8:2, 10-15.
- White, J. (1997). *Education at the End of Work. A New Philosophy and Learning*. London: Cassell.
- Wildemeersch, D., Stroobants, V., Bron Jr, M. (Eds.) (2005). *Active Citizenship and Multiple Identities in Europe. A learning outlook*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Wolf, A. (1995). *Competence-based assessment*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Notes

Note 1. See the Presidency Conclusions of the 23-24 March 2000 Lisbon European Council.

Note 2. This list was proposed by Reijo Aholainen (European Commission, DG EAC) on Nov. 3, 2009 while introducing the European Year of Creativity and Innovation 2009 to the Education Committee ("Promoting Creativity and Innovation through the Lifelong Learning").

Note 3. Starting from 7.1% in 2000, it rose up to 9.6% in 2006, but then the growth slowed down and, in 2007, the percentage was still 9.7% (see *ibid.*, p. 4).

Note 4. See *ibid.*, p. 3: "Adult participation in lifelong learning is insufficient to reach the targets."

Note 5. See *ibid.*, p. 13: "Progress towards meeting the five benchmarks set for 2010 has been insufficient", and p. 3: "Most of the benchmarks that the Council set for 2010 will not be reached."

Note 6. The expression "Adult learner" is strictly linked with the definition of "Adult education" (e.g. "Liberal/Popular education" in many Nordic countries, "Further education/Post-16 Education" in the UK, Ireland, Latvia, etc.) The interpretation of the term adult itself may be the age of consent (legal age), or the age of completion of the compulsory education (varying from country to country). According to Eurostat, and in the EU documents in general, adult learners are considered to be 25-64 years old people (of working age).

Note 7. I.e. to analyze effects of reforms in other educational sectors on adult learning; improve the quality of provision; increase the possibilities to achieve at least one higher-level qualification; speed up the process of assessing and recognizing non-formal and informal learning for disadvantaged groups and improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector.

Note 8. EC (2010), p. 5: "Evidence of the positive impacts of adult learning on overall employability and mobility in the labor market has been largely demonstrated."

Note 9. The project of Innovation Strategy for Education and Training led by the OECD Directorate for Education (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation) is precisely about helping countries to achieve these objectives. It provides further evidence on the necessary skills for the 21st century that promote innovation and creativity and highlight the role of the educational systems to promote the development and uptake of these skills, and also emphasizes key elements of any viable innovation strategy in the education sector.

Note 10. "Competence is the mobilization or the activation of various knowledge in a given situation or context" (own translation).

Note 11. "Competence allows to act and/or to solve professional problems in a satisfactory way in a certain context, by mobilizing different capacities in an integrated way" (own translation).

Note 12. At the 2nd Brussels Debate "Beyond chalk and Talk: Creativity in the classroom".