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ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION IN SMALL AND ISLAND STATES: THE CASE OF MALTA

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INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on adult education provision in the micro island state of Malta. In focusing most of the discussion in terms of the scale factor, we attempt to shed some light on the dynamics of adult education in a small and island state environment. This remains our main concern as we discuss such issues as emigration, multifunctionalism, the high dependency on foreign aid, the enhancement of a "rentier status" and the ease with which one assumes expertise. All these, we argue, can impinge on the nature of adult education provision in a micro island state, as our discussion on Malta will show.

[THE CASE OF MALTA](#)

There is quite a long history of adult education provision in Malta. State sponsored provision dates back at least to 1850, mainly in the area of adult basic education. It took on the form of a community school in the village of Tarxien, vocational schools, Sunday classes and night schools (Vancell 1996), at a time when, despite British colonial rule, Italian still remained the language used in several of the institutions of Malta's civil society. Arguably, the history of state-sponsored formal education in Malta, is, until the Compulsory Education Ordinance of 1947

(Zammit Mangion 1992, 58), a history of evening class provision for adults. Manifest throughout this history are issues that reflect the struggle for definition of citizenship and subjectivity, which, in turn, reflect the struggle for hegemony between two external cultural forces. Of these, the force of Italianita, which had its roots firmly entrenched in the island's civil society, emanated from Southern Italy and found its major repository in the traditional intellectuals of the clerico-professional classes, mainly priests, lawyers and doctors. These professions have historically enjoyed a position of uncontested privilege in pre-industrial society (Larson 1977). The other contending force was Anglicization, bound intimately with the colonial project carried forward by the British who ruled the island for a period of over 150 years. Adult literacy in the English language was promoted and served a dual purpose. Firstly, it promoted Anglicization in Malta and in countries which received Maltese emigrants, namely Canada, the US, Australia and, to a certain extent, Britain (Zammit Marmara 1995; Baldacchino & Mayo 1995). Secondly, adult education of the state-sponsored type became a form of education for export, a vehicle foreseeing the economic and demographic pressures brought about by overpopulation (Casolani 1930; Attard 1988 & 1989; Vancell 1996; Zammit Marmara 1995). There are 370,000 residents on a territorial surface area of only 316 square kilometres.

The islands' lack of natural resources, coupled with a very high population density, has made emigration the safety valve at various stages throughout its history (cf. Attard 1983 & 1989; Price 1954; Dench 1976; Yorke 1986). Because of its rudimentary nature, one might argue that adult education fostered deference to the English language both at home and abroad, contributing, in the latter case, to the consolidation of white, Anglo-power. White Anglo culture is projected as the invisible norm presupposed by the existence of the insular other (Borg & Mayo 1994). The other here refers to those ethnic groups where, at best, only a smattering of English was spoken. Maltese emigrants constituted such a group, as has been indicated in preliminary qualitative research on this issue (Borg & Mayo 1994; Borg, Camilleri & Mayo 1995).

The history of adult education for export is, for micro-states, intimately bound up with a history of emigration into Western countries where colonization takes on a different form and translates into becoming part of a subaltern group in a multi-ethnic society with a dominant Anglo culture. Small state islanders who remained at home received a rudimentary adult basic education which still served the interests of the metropole in that it consolidated the process of dependency inclination. In the Maltese case, Anglicization stood in sharp contrast to the traditional and more dangerous Italianate culture, given the Fascist threat of the thirties. The predominance of English was the principal characteristic of adult education provision in Malta, it having been established as the language of jobs and social mobility. Furthermore, there were serious doubts if the adult education program would have received any state funding had it not improved emigration prospects for the participants (Vancell 1990).

Adult education is part and parcel of a process of formal education which might not be the most relevant to local needs and circumstances yet which is certainly the most desirable form of education to its culturally incorporated citizenry. Even in more recent years, when emigration to former British colonies of settlement stopped being the panacea for the country's economic ills, with the growth of the tourist sector and the development of those other rentier services typical of micro-island states (Baldacchino 1993, 43), the demand for English and other foreign

language teaching continued to remain the primary concern. Developments in the political aspects of education highlight how the indigenous language had come to be regarded as the appropriate vehicle for an adult education program intended to generate greater social participation. But this poses problems for small states like Malta, with open economies and where reliance on a small local market would restrict business opportunities. Furthermore, the Western colonial legacy is firmly entrenched in the microstate institutions of civil society. Thus, an insufficient competence in a language of international currency (English, in Malta's case) maintains people at the periphery of political life, even in their home country.

Despite the constitutional affirmation of Maltese as one of the country's two official languages in 1934, we still witness an imbalance in the teaching of both languages at all levels of the Maltese educational system (Zammit Mangion, 1988; Borg et al 1995), adult education included. Resources for the teaching of English to adults are more readily available than is the case with the teaching of literacy in Maltese and this does not apply solely to the obvious case of textbook provision. Arguably, the most striking aspect of this imbalance, as far as the State goes, is the existence of the English Language Resource Centre itself. There are, in fact, resource centres for most foreign languages being taught in Malta but there is not even one such centre which could assist teachers of the native Maltese language. This is to the detriment of the teaching of Maltese at school and to the teaching of adult literacy in the native language. As was the case with the English Language Resource Centre in Valletta, the Maltese capital, adult educators can avail themselves of these centres to hold meetings, consult and select appropriate material and pool teaching resources (Mayo 1994, 35).

A developing micro-state is more likely to attract foreign aid through an investment in foreign language teaching than through an investment in the native tongue, despite often populist exhortations appealing to nationalistic sentiments. Moreover, as underlined earlier, this is part and parcel of an educational enterprise not only characterized by cosmopolitan colonial invasion but also as an explicit strategy to enhance the country's rentier status and to come to better terms with the vagaries of an open economy. As Bray (1991) argues: "many small states, perhaps even more than medium sized and large states, are heavily dependent on foreign trade. This influences the structure of the labour market, and thus also the educational system. It may require people to learn foreign languages, perhaps to the detriment of local ones" (p. 19).

The use of a foreign language at the expense of the Maltese language in adult education can have the negative effect of creating a distance between teacher and taught, with implications for pedagogy as well. The constant use of foreign languages, especially a language which is the cultural capital of a select group of people in a particular society, can adversely affect the nature of social relations in the particular adult education program. It can serve to encourage "banking education" since people are more likely to converse uninhibitedly in the popular language. Of course, the language factor is not the only reason for resorting to banking education in an adult education program. Vancell (1996) and Enriquez (1995) indicate that it is a favoured mode of teaching among the adult educators they saw in action in Malta. We wonder whether it was not also a favoured approach with adult participants. One obvious explanation for the preference for this approach is the lack of preparation of the teachers concerned as adult educators.

RESOURCE MULTIFUNCTIONALITY

There is a lack of tradition, in Malta, of having purposely trained adult educators. It is a culture of traditional schooling which characterizes state-sponsored adult education provision in Malta. The key word here is multifunctionalism or flexible specialization (Baldacchino 1995, 268-270). "The scarcity of manpower [sic] and financial and material resources exert great pressure on the people working in the educational sphere" (Farrugia 1991, 585). Multifunctional roles are taken on, both in terms of premises and personnel. So adult education classes are taken on by school teachers who have not been exposed even to the slightest consideration of nontraditional teaching styles. Meanwhile, school premises are used as adult education centres, often without the restructuring necessary to accommodate adults. This situation is typical of small states, Cyprus being another case in point (i.e., Symeonides 1992, 206 & 207).

Senior officials responsible for adult education have to combine their administrative obligations in this regard with similar duties in a variety of other fields. Moreover, within the area of adult education, a very broad area in itself, there is no room for specialization. For example, an official specializing, through formal training, in adult literacy, will have to deal with a broad range of areas, perhaps including community development, educational gerontology and parental education. Similarly, support staff handling material connected with adult education programs have to do so by combining this activity with a whole array of other activities within the post-secondary sector. This was certainly the case with the various civil servants handling adult education affairs in Malta's Department of Education.

Multifunctionalism is a key feature of the adult educational set up of small states, given the scarcity of specialized personnel and material resources. Versatility or flexible specialization is the order of the day (Bennell & Oxenham 1983; Brock 1988, 306). So the educator who is formally trained to become a school teacher feels versatile enough to teach children during the day, adults in the evening and possibly foreign students in the summer months. The University's diploma course in adult education attracts only a handful of participants. Adult education is considered a marginal part-time activity which does not warrant a person's investment in two years of university evening study. The challenge for small states, therefore, is to render initial teacher preparation programs, like the University's four-year honours degree program in education, an adequate preparatory course for effective flexible specialization. Adult education would become a subsidiary area in this program so that prospective multifunctional educators can be adequately prepared to handle the different requirements involved in teaching children and adults effectively. In short, what we are arguing for is an initial teacher education program tailored to the specific needs of a micro-island state in that it would prepare student-educators for multifunctional roles. Nonetheless, there would be enough background in each segment of the course to ensure that such a broad-based degree will provide them with a firm foundation for further graduate studies both at home and abroad. Multifunctionalism would thus be turned from an apparent weakness into a strength.

A similar argument holds for the restructuring of schools and the rebuilding of some of them as multipurpose learning sites. As Jules (1994/5, 10) argues, these can serve as a means for countering the "relatively high per capita cost of social infrastructure" by making more cost effective use of facilities, therefore "avoiding their wasteful duplication". Schools and universities, if used for only limited times throughout the day and year, can easily constitute a form of idle capital.

The notion of flexible use of resources is crucial here. Flexible specialization, as Farrugia and Attard (1989) have illustrated, is a feature of the administrative set up of the educational sector in small states. Highly specialized degrees in specific areas of education are often sought abroad and, on their return home following the termination of their scholarship, the recipients of these qualifications have to broaden their area of specialization considerably in order to function effectively within the constraints of the home country. They can also find their career structures blocked since seniority can lead to less qualified persons occupying the senior positions in the area. Adult education in Malta also appears to be one area where expertise can easily be dispensed with. After all, adult education in small states has been remedial in character.

EXPERTISE

Adult education for export, the vehicle for prospective emigrants to occupy peripheral roles in the receiving countries labour market, could well have established some kind of remedial evening class syndrome in this field. This might prove difficult to shake off. In situations such as these, where adult education continues to be associated with basic remedial education and takes on the form of evening classes, it becomes relatively easy to assume expertise. Furthermore, the connection between adult education and evening classes leads to a situation where expertise, if available, can easily be dispensed with, being considered as a case of over qualification. It is assumed that one does not require too much preparation to organize evening classes on the lines conventionally followed within Malta's Department of Education.

Furthermore, the specialized nature of the field and the limited structures in existence make the pool of experts available really limited. Furthermore, the likelihood of "pseuds" posing as experts and getting away with it is considerable. Not only are there few people around to call one's bluff, but even if there were, the management of intimacy factor would come into play (Lowenthal 1987).

The criticism of people working in close proximity could land a person in very awkward situations. Such is all the more likely to occur in adult education. Even in larger and better endowed countries, adult education still assumes the status of an emerging field. University and bureaucratic positions have until recently been occupied by people whose formal academic preparation has been in other fields such as History, Psychology, Sociology, Political Theory and Comparative Education. If even in large countries with greater resources and greater specialization, where universities have entire departments dedicated to adult education, people move into adult education without formal qualifications in the field, this situation of easily assuming newly declared expertise is likely to be more pronounced in micro-states where flexible specialization is the order of the day.

VOCATIONALISM

In small and island states like Malta, with a tradition of education for export and flexible specialization, there will be constant pressure to retool labour. The pressure is likely to be stepped up as Malta, like Cyprus, seeks accession to the European Union (EU). One anticipates that adult vocational education, spearheaded by the Employment & Training Corporation (henceforth ETC), will be the growth area in adult continuing education in the forthcoming

years. The ETC's efforts in this regard will be influenced, in all probability, by the relevant funding structures within the EU. And here, the micro-island state issue again breaks surface. There are specific conditions, in microstate socio-economic systems, to which sensitivity is required of any external donor agency (and micro-states depend on foreign aid proportionately more than larger states) intending to genuinely assist in the development of another country. To what extent will the two micro-island states of Cyprus and Malta highlight their specific requirements and modus operandi when negotiating their terms of accession to the EU? To what extent can they persuade prospective sponsors to modify conditions for the provision of funds intended to develop adult vocational education projects within the context of a developing micro-island state?

The adult education issues raised above prove pertinent, with respect to the Maltese context, to small and island states and territories generally. The comments, based on inductively and experientially derived accounts, suggest a different, specific rationale for an education for export policy, for the multifunctionality of teachers and schools and for the structural disadvantage suffered by the vernacular in relation to internationally current languages. We can now, from the vantage point developed above, explore the relevance of these broad strokes of commentary by theorizing the implication for adult continuing education in a more analytic way. In so doing, we are proposing the rudiments for a theory of adult continuing education in a small and island state setting.

THEORIZING ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

It is not uncommon to come across researchers as well as policy makers who simply use the small and island state setting as a backdrop which has no operational bearing on the case at hand. Adult and continuing education in small and island states, as with so many other issues which attract interest, may be about adult and continuing education in circumstances which merely happen to be small and/or insular. Others would contend that some of the adult education issues and considerations experienced by and in small and island states are similar to those of larger nations but "writ large". This is to say, they are simply extreme or intensified versions of what are essentially the same or similar problems (Brock & Smawfield 1988, 228; Brock 1987, 9).

We would go further and propose that small, developing (mainly island) states and semi-autonomous jurisdictions share unique and idiosyncratic social, political and administrative characteristics. There is increasing evidence and admission of an ecology associated with smallness (Harden 1985; Farrugia 1993). The failure to acknowledge that much is in itself not surprising given that small and island states still adhere stubbornly to the standards and precepts of larger societies. They seem unwilling, perhaps even unable, to break out of the paradigm of neo-colonialism and cosmopolitanism. They fail miserably in understanding and appreciating the predicament of smallness and islandness, opting instead to try and get their experience to fit big state doctrinal moulds.

FIVE PROPOSITIONS

What are the implications of the ecology of smallness for adult and continuing education? What can one theorize out of the experiences of particular small and island states like Malta? To

answer, we have reviewed the available primary data, corroborated by a literature search, primary research in a number of small state environments but also grounded in our privileged personal experiences as inhabitants of and educators in a micro island state. As a result, five propositions relating to the idiosyncrasies of adult and continuing education in small (mainly island) states are being put forward. Their isolation as distinct features is mainly for analytic value, since in reality they are interdependent and feed into each other. This interlinkage comes to the fore in the manner in which all five features strengthen the resort to a particular adult and continuing education format in the micro-state milieu.

1. The first proposition concerns the important issue of emigration. The historical importance of emigration for small states leads us to devote more space to this issue than is the case with the remaining four propositions. It is tempting to consider small and island settings as closed systems (i.e., Marshall 1982, 454; Dommen 1980). Metaphors equating islands and small states to total institutions (after Goffman 1961)--such as prisons, oases, drifting vessels, barracoons, closed worlds--are evocative expressions of this rendering. However, not all escape hatches are shut. Emigration is the medium which permits a conquering of the tyranny of space (Wood 1982, 300); the ultimate management via usurpation of the ecology of small scale.

International migration in fact appears heaviest from the smallest territories (Ward 1967, 95). A large proportion of ex-small and island state citizens are today already living abroad (Lowenthal 1987, 41-3). In archipelagic microstates, the migration effect is at times just as pronounced at the intra-island level, the attracting growth poles being tourist, mining and government employment, typically based around the capital city (McKee & Tisdell 1990). Given such a scenario, adult continuing education can become an important policy consideration in small and island territories in relation to the issue of emigration. This was certainly the case in Malta for the greater part of this century.

In micro states, labour, that priceless and unique natural resource, may prove too readily available and therefore could constitute a demographic liability. Jules (1994/5) argues that, in the micro-states of the Caribbean, "the flow of people to the metropolis", generally speaking, "becomes particularly acute during periods of economic stress" (p. 6). The easing of population pressure becomes a policy priority. Since governments in small and island states often anticipate and encourage migration, they have to ensure that the educational qualities of their people are marketable in the destination countries (Bray 1991, 19; Fergus 1987, 37). Adult education could provide those necessary skills--technical and linguistic--which enable the labour surplus to acquire the necessary qualifications to become acceptable in a recipient location. That the numbers of such emigrants will never be large in absolute terms is likely to mean that host destinations are less likely to impose strict entry quotas or immigration barriers. One can argue that the socio-spatial characteristics of small and island states oblige a proactive, education for export strategy; while diplomatic efforts by small and island state governments should pursue those initiatives which open up still more possibilities for islanders to pack up and leave. Forget the hype about exile, brain drain, skill drain and priceless human resources. People are liabilities as much as, or more than, they are assets in small and island states. The following excerpts from semi-structured interviews with academics at the University of the West Indies in Barbados indicate that this situation is not unique to Malta but is shared by other micro-island states:

We have exported teachers to Montreal, domestic and transport workers to the U.K. Had not these people emigrated, your guess is as good as mine. Never mind the talk about the brain drain . . .

Suppose 25 of your graduates shake off the dust of Barbados every year What have you lost? What have you wasted? Especially if they send back remittances to their families?

Education is the ticket to the international labour market . . . If other countries are willing to sustain Barbadians given that there are limited opportunities locally, then why not? Export of people is a means of generating foreign exchange, through remittances. This is like an insurance policy.

- 2. Back at home, there is a perennial urgency to re-tool labour: Even the most modest of local projects is bound to strain the labour supply. Conversely, the closure of a plant or factory may completely upset economic development and the economic situation. The small and island state labour scenario is one of boom and bust waves as the country invests, first in one skill, then another, successively and contemporaneously (Higginson 1987, 148-9). This trend is enhanced further by the pressure to come up with brand new projects which meet the approval of foreign aid donors or loan providers, rather than better usage being made of existing ones. Vocational adult education provides the new skills and expertise required by professional and technical cadres enabling these to remain employable at home by hopping deftly from one project or job to another (Knapman 1987, 151).
- 3. Critical mass constraints often mean that the small state can rarely possess all the specialisms it feels it ought to have, particularly in areas for which demand is limited. And, even when such expertise is locally available, the small scale condition makes its practice difficult. For many specialist occupations, demand is not large enough to warrant the employment of even one person. Expertise is also too scarce to be wasted by strict adherence to job descriptions. There is strong pressure for a widening of one's occupational profile. Versatility in skills is a necessity in small states for changing jobs when there is no possibility of rising higher in the same field. It is also a saving grace to a blocked career path. Thus, flexibility and breadth--multifunctionality (Farrugia & Attard 1989) rather than depth may be a key parameter of employment patterns and job routines--a situation whereby there are Jacks and Jills of many trades but, hopefully, masters and mistresses of all (Bennell & Oxenham 1983).

This environmental inducement towards flexible specialization means that it is most unlikely to come across full-time, careerist adult educators in small states. For most, if not all, adult and continuing education is merely one of a much wider repertoire--of jobs and roles that people perform in the formal and informal economy, successively or simultaneously. This observation implies that most adult educators will be part-timers, drawn typically from the cadres of teachers and other members of the education sub-sector of the local small state or island economy. They are thus also likely to condone a spill over of the pedagogic techniques and principles used readily in the formal situation of schooling into the adult education encounter. Does adult education therefore become invariably a case of adult schooling? (Baldacchino & Mayo 1995, 1996).

4. Related to the tendency towards flexible specialists is an uncanny relative ease of assuming the status of expert: many plodders make it to the top (Kersell 1987, 106). This is so because it is "easy to hit the limelight" (Bray & Fergus 1986, 94). In small countries, employees rise higher and faster than similarly (or even more) qualified employees elsewhere (Baker 1992, 15). There are few intermediate rungs in the ladder of social mobility. Various specializations remain underdeveloped and unrecognized until claimed by enterprising individuals. The personalization of social life also induces a potential towards monument building. Adult and continuing education may be such a niche of expertise which carries many social rewards. The tendency towards such a dispensation of expertise in adult education holds true also in larger countries, given that adult education is currently an emerging field and people enjoying prestigious positions in this area achieved their formal training in other academic fields.

The outcome may be a dilettantism which is nevertheless never exposed. There is nobody authoritative enough around to call one's bluff; and the management of intimacy prevalent in small-scale settings exacts such a high premium on conflict that it is often not worth entertaining (Lowenthal 1987; May & Tupouniua 1980; Richards 1982). The outcrier may be him/herself another pseud, after all. Self-professed expertise gets away with it. As states the proverb: "in the land of the blind, the one-eyed is king . . . or queen." It is only in measuring oneself internationally that a real expert stands some chance of being identified. Yes adult educators may be emperors; but they may have no clothes on.

5. The small-scale scenario is typically a cosmopolitan one. The small, island state presents a high level of formal educational achievement, a condition related to smallness in the sense that small size and insularity have accentuated the duration and depth of Western colonial penetration--small islands have been colonized first and politically decolonized last, if at all (Baldacchino 1993). Former colonial regimes introduced a system of Western schooling, both in the interests of co-optative acculturation as well as to recruit literate workers into the lower echelons of local public administration. Even after independence, the cultural pressures towards Western models of conspicuous consumption; economic pressures towards further integration and plugging strategies into external trade and flows; social pressures towards educational qualifications which are convertible in, and for, the metropole . . . the setting points resolutely towards an academic model which enthusiastically welcomes foreign tutors; recruits foreign consultants; uses foreign textbooks and prepares students for foreign examinations. This may not be the most relevant, but it is certainly the most desirable form of education.

In this context, the medium of instruction and debate becomes politically charged. If foreign is better, then the tendency is to resort to a foreign (typically international) language, as the medium of instruction, in basic and also adult, continuing education. This is still more likely to occur if:

- (a) the main purpose of adult education is education for export;
- (b) the program is intended to benefit from external sponsorship;
- (c) it seeks to aspire towards higher social status; or

(d) there are only local "experts" teaching in the field and who may therefore fail to appreciate the mobilizing potential of their activity.

The choice will thus also feed into pedagogy, because a foreign language is more likely to induce a dogmatic, banking approach to adult education; while the resort to the vernacular is bound to incite much greater classroom participation (Mayo 1994).

CONCLUSION

These five propositions emerge from the exposition on the characteristics of adult and continuing education in a specific micro island state context. Through the exposition and conclusions derived, we hope to have shed some light on what could be the situation in contexts which, in terms of size, are far removed from those that are allowed most of the space in the international literature in adult and continuing education. They suggest a different explanation of what is, and perhaps what should be, going on in the small and island settings. They highlight the means of turning what are often considered weaknesses into strengths. We hope that this preliminary study would make policy makers in small states wary of uncritically taking on board adult education concepts deriving from much larger contexts. No matter how well publicized these concepts might be, they might never be suited to the characteristics of an island micro-state. The argument we make would, of course, become more persuasive if grounded in a comparative analysis of micro-state behaviour and practices. This, we feel, is the direction in which further research in the area should move. We submit the above propositions as a possible theoretical framework for such comparative research.

a This is a shortened version of a larger comparative paper, tabled at the Malta conference, drawing on empirical research in Barbados and Malta.

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