

**Marcella Milana and John Holford (Eds.), *Adult Education and the European Union. Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers/ESREA 179 pp ISBN 978-94-6209-546-5 (pbk) 978-94-6209-547-2 (HBK) 978-94-6209-548-9 (e Book)**

This is the first book in the ESREA series ‘Research on the Education and Learning of Adults’. It provides volumes containing developed papers deriving from conferences in connection with ESREA, the premier European agency on adult education research, responsible among others for the publication of the peer reviewed journal known as *RELA*.<sup>1</sup> This series is not to be confused with Sense’s older series on ‘International issues in Adult Education’ which I edit. The ESREA series mainly consists of edited compendia of papers from the thematic network research groups and the seminars held in various European localities.

Publication of a book around this theme is timely as some EU member states or regions within such states are currently providing Lifelong Learning Strategies (National or Provincial) which, in many respects, underline the indirect influence on policy in the field of adult education which the EU, as a supranational body, is exerting, specifically through its funding and other mechanisms, exchange programmes and much followed and borrowed (reinvented?) policy discourse. It has to be said, however, that education is meant to be an area of national sovereignty and control. Furthermore, there has been no follow up to the much influential 2001 EU Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, despite the widespread anticipation of an updated policy document a decade later. Instead we have a watered down document on adult learning, the ‘EU Agenda for Adult Learning,’ which somehow kept this aspect of educational provision alive on the EU agenda.

This book contains papers, some of which more accessible than others, in terms of conceptual clarity, that shed light on the development of the concept of Lifelong learning from its initial UNESCO formulation and elaboration as Lifelong Education, more expansive in scope than that at present, to the more OECD and EU driven economic discourse on lifelong learning, focusing on ‘employability’ which does not necessarily mean ‘employment’ and which places the onus on individuals, rather than the provision of structures, for one’s ongoing learning. This was cynically regarded as a means of ‘responsibilisation’ to adopt the sociological term critiquing this focus on individual as opposed to social responsibility. In this regard, Rasmussen’s reference to Jürgen Habermas’ “diagnosis that the EU needs to change its decision-making processes into the ‘cizenship mode’”(p. 28) is very apt. The genealogy of the concept is explained in a few chapters, a case of tilling familiar ground, as many other writers had done this earlier (Murphy, 2007; Field, 2001, 2010; Tuijnman, A and Boström, 2002; Wain, 2004; Borg and Mayo, 2005).

Social theory, notably that by Foucault, features prominently in this volume through the work of Norman and Pacheco, and Frejes. Their revealing discussions around Foucauldian themes, notably ‘governmentality’, technologies of the self, and regimes of

---

<sup>1</sup> European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults.

truth and practice, complement the earlier published work by Kenneth Wain, alas not cited in this volume, who did much to bring the Foucauldian dimension into lifelong learning debates not only with his critique of this discourse as propounded by regulating bodies, including the EU, but also in his exploration of the positive dimension of power, in the Foucauldian sense, and therefore the potential of lifelong education as 'self-creation', the key conclusion to his 2004 book.

Papers cover a range of topics. We come across a discussion concerning the transition of adult learning from the margins to the mainstream (Mohorčič Špolar and Holford), rehearsing ideas concerning the broad spectrum of the field, but finally providing nuanced views on the realm of EU policy discourse in this regard, which ties in with the overarching theme of the volume and the relevant network. There is also a very detailed, though not always clear discussion on the State and its changing nature within the context of Europeanisation (Milana), and the pressures for 'national,' as opposed to European, spaces experienced in this regard. The role of lifelong learning in this context is examined. This is not an easy read but it would be well worth the effort of struggling through and engaging with the text which is dense but rich in terms of details and nuances. Equally instructive and refreshing is the discussion of the legal basis of EU policies, especially with regard to lifelong learning, from a sociological perspective, in short a 'sociology of law' perspective. Sociology of Law is a much developed area on the European continent which has furnished us with some of the finest contemporary sociologists, the Portuguese Boaventura de Sousa Santos in particular. The field has much to offer to discussions on lifelong learning as Evangelous Koutidou from Greece shows us, especially with regard to Greek interpretations of the relevant 'soft laws' that are in place. Policy borrowing and transfer is also an area worth exploring, as Pia Cort, indicates with a focus on discourse analysis and narrative inquiry.

This, in my view, raises an important issue. We are now at the stage, also given national, or, in the case of Spain, provincial, Lifelong Learning strategies, where we need case studies exploring and demonstrating how policy is reinvented within specific jurisdictions, as Klatt indicates. I would argue that imaginative organisations manage to wriggle their way past the conditions of European funding to worm in their own specific agendas, including broader social agendas, thus indicating how lifelong learning, as all learning and education for that matter, remains a contested terrain. What roles do local 'filtering' agencies (ESF funds are channelled through national agencies) play in this regard? Do they facilitate processes of 'reinvention' or do they act as more stringent agencies, not wanting to take risks lest they fall foul of the larger supranational entity? How do, for instance, agencies and communities from Southern European and 'semi-peripheral' countries creatively reinvent EU policies to bring on board aspects of their own rich but overlooked, in EU discourse, traditions in the field? As Milana and Holford, the two editors, one an Italian and the other English, state at the very outset: "European adult educators are sometimes prey to the vanity that adult education began in Europe", hopefully Europe in all its dimensions - Southern, Eastern, Western and Northern. European adult education is not just about Grundtvig, laudible and instructive though his and his followers' legacies remain. It is also about the 150 hours, the Factory Councils, Capitini, Manzi, Dolci, the efforts of the Second Spanish Republic, the Yugoslav 'self-management' worker education initiatives, the 'rural universities', the reinvented (with

regard to the original Brazilian) ‘participatory budget’ experiments, the ‘social creation’ and ‘social solidarity economy’ projects and so forth.

## References

Borg, C and Mayo, P (2005) “The EU Memorandum on Lifelong Learning. Old Wine in new Bottles?” *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 3(2), 257–278

Field, J (2001) “Lifelong Education”. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 20 (1/2): 3-15.

Field, J (2010). "Lifelong learning." In P. Peterson, E. Baker, & B. McGaw (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Education* (3rd ed). Oxford: Elsevier

Murphy, M (1997) "Capital, Class and Adult Education: The International Political Economy of Lifelong Learning in the European Union." In P. Armstrong, N. Miller, & M. Zukas (Eds.) and "Crossing borders. Breaking boundaries: Research in the Education of Adults," Proceedings of the 27th Annual SCUTREA Conference, Birkbeck College, University of London

Tuijnman, A., and Boström, A. K. (2002). “Changing notions of lifelong education and lifelong learning” In *International Review of Education*, 48 (1-2), 93-110.

Wain, K (2004) *The Learning Society in a Postmodern World. The education Crisis*. New York, Vienna, Frankfurt and London: Peter Lang.

**Peter Mayo**

*University of Malta*