

ADULTS RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING AND CITIZENSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Andreia Caetano, Joaquim Luís Coimbra & José Manuel Castro

Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, University of Porto, Portugal
acaetano@fpce.up.pt, jcoimbra@fpce.up.pt, jcastro@fpce.up.pt

ABSTRACT

The main goal of this paper is to understand the extent to which adult civic awareness is fostered by New Opportunity Centres (NOC) – i.e., prior learning recognition, validation and certification Portuguese centers - and whether it can promote, among these adults, an active participation in civic and political issues.

Despite living in a globalised and democratic society, Portugal still has a rather low level of literacy and qualification, which is still a reminiscence of its historical, educational and political past. In order to solve this qualification gap and the increase of unequal social opportunities, the so-called NOC's have as their main aim to recognise, validate, and certificate key-competencies acquired by means of informal and non-formal learning.

Departing from this non-formal education, our research aims to understand the transformations of the field of AET, as well as if there is a *décalage* of explicit social-political project of NOC and its personal impact on adult citizens.

Results will focus two different conceptions about citizenship in EAT - experts and adults visions – so that we can analyse if NOC's emphasize an interaction and participation of these adults into their local communities and in the wider society.

Keywords: participation, adult education and training, recognition of prior learning devices, citizenship education, educational policies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Portugal, as well as other European countries experienced, in a recent past, an intensive dictatorship regime, considered one of the longest across Western Europe in XX century, which had profound impact on very different social fields, as well as on Portuguese's identity as full-rights citizens in a democracy (Azevedo & Menezes, 2008).

This regime, so-called “Salazarismo”, lasted for 48 years – from 1926 until 1974 - and relied on the absence of speech, opinion and association freedom. Back here, the formal educational system entailed a directive and passive relationship to knowledge, considering pupils as blank sheets that needed to be fulfilled with the knowledge of the “Master”. Besides this elitist and socially stratified pedagogy, Salazar's development

policy had profound consequences to economic, political and social development of Portugal.

In the 70's, following the World Crisis (Oil Crisis of 1973), the unemployment raised and lead several families to precarious situations. To overcome the economical instability of 60's and 70's, children left school to go to work in their early childhood and to contribute to the maintenance of their families. At this time, Portugal had a compulsory education of 6 years and the literacy reached 26%²⁶, as a consequence of economical and political instability.

The political regime also-called "Estado Novo" (1933-1974), was overthrown on the 25th of April, 1974 and, consequently, was established a Democratic State, based on political liberalism. Portugal's democratic transition and entrance in EEC (European Economic Community) had also profound implications on educational policies. This period was characterized by some political stability that allowed the development of educational Reforms, as well as the increase of compulsory education to 9 years. (LBSE, 1986, Article 6)

Considering the guiding lines of LBSE (1986), the educational system should "contribute to the achievement of the student through the **full development of personality, character formation and citizenship**" (LBSE, 1986, Article 3). In this way, highlighting the structural and conceptual transformation of AET, the aim of this research is to understand if there is a *décalage* in the conception and perception of citizenship and participation between experts that design RVCC framework and adults that attend this process.

2. METHODOLOGY

To achieve our aim, this research entails a **study case** analysis, based on the **Ecological Model of Human Development** (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986) which emphasizes an analysis of several life contexts, for instance: individual, family, NOC, community. It emerged from results shown in other studies such as in Azevedo & Menezes (2008) which states that "(...) parental influence in adolescents' political development is exerted through other channels, for instance family discussions about politics and parents role as models of participatory citizens."

Considering parents as role models, our target group embraces a group of adults that belongs to a Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences process of the Lower Secondary level (9th grade) in a NOC from Porto.

In order to answer some of our research questions – *Is there a décalage in the conception and perception of both citizenship and participation between experts that design RVCC framework and adults enrolled in RVCC? Does the shadow of the authoritarian past still accounts in an actual conception and practice of citizenship in the sense that citizens can think and behave autonomously, for themselves as actors in a democratic society?* –, our study regards the transformation of AET, as well as the comprehension of function, role, impact and importance attached to issues related to citizenship in the context of AET. At the moment, our data relies on 2 semi-structured interviews to experts of AET and 1 focus group with 6 adults that attend the RVCC process that we will start to expose.

²⁶ in <http://www.novasoportunidades.gov.pt/np4/7.html#a0>

3. RESULTS

3.1. REDEFINITION OF ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Article 2 of LBSE (1986:3068) indicates that the “**education system** should respond to the **needs that social reality arises, (...) encouraging the formation of free, responsible, autonomous and supportive citizens and promoting the human dimension of work.**”

This Law promoted a strong focus on equal opportunities policy, as well as an awareness of the social needs. LBSE also reflects the strong focus on Continuing Education that had been promoted by UNESCO and developed since the 70's. However, ANEFA (Education and Adult Training National Agency) was only created in 1999 (13 years later LBSE) and the system of Recognition of Prior Learning has implemented, in 2001, the process of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Skills (RVCC).

In 2005, the OCDE (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development) study “Education at a Glance”²⁷ reveals that the average of education consists of 12 years. By comparing Portugal to other European Union Countries, we can verify that it has one of the lowest average concerning education (8, 2%) while Norway shows the highest (13, 8%).²⁸

In order to reduce this gap, policies starts to focus the raise of qualifications level, emphasizing Lifelong Learning and creating the “**New Opportunities Centres**”, which promotes recognition of prior learning through a scholar certificate. Denying the learning associated with the transmission of knowledge, limited to a formal education system at a given stage of life, learning becomes crucial for the individual and for society, since education and training recognized as a “passport for life” (Castro, 2010). Table 2 shows education levels between 1998 and 2009:

Table 2: Educational Level of Portuguese Population between 1998 and 2009

Date	Without Educational Level	Basic Education			Upper Secondary Education
		1st Cycle	2nd Cycle	3rd Cycle	
1998	18,9	34,2	16,2	14,1	10,4
2001	17,3	33,0	16,4	14,8	11,7
2005	13,4	30,9	15,8	16,8	13,6
2006	12,8	30,3	15,9	17,0	14,0
2008	11,7	29,6	15,3	18,7	13,9
2009	10,8	29,1	14,6	19,6	14,7

Source: INE (National Institute of Statistics) *in* http://www.pordata.pt/azap_runtime/?n=4

Although illiteracy rates remain high, we found that it decreased 8, 1% between these years. Regarding Basic Education, data shows a **decrease** of population with lower levels of education, mainly in the 1st and 2nd cycle of basic education. At the 3rd cycle there is a significant difference: the percentage of people who hold this level **increases**. In this way, results demonstrate the impact of AET on educational level.

²⁷ *in* http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2005_eag-2005-en

²⁸ [http://www.novasoportunidades.gov.pt/np4/%7B\\$clientServletPath%7D/?newsId=39&fileName=Iniciativa_Novas_Oportunidades.pdf](http://www.novasoportunidades.gov.pt/np4/%7B$clientServletPath%7D/?newsId=39&fileName=Iniciativa_Novas_Oportunidades.pdf)

However, AET's framework has changed through time. Firstly, it had an individual and militant approach that emerged from popular context (e.g., NGOs). In the mid XX century, boosted by the 70's World Crisis, AET is oriented by economic interests that promoted its *operationalization* and, in this way, discourses about AET reveal the political concerns onwards development, employment, social cohesion and economic competitiveness. Consequently, adults were guided to training processes in order to solve the economic and social problems of Portugal, creating a link between educational policies and employment policies.

Later on XXth century, AET adopts a *functional* approach. Since then, RVCC is seen as an agency of socialization that should adapt adults to new changes. In this sense, based on a lifelong learning structure, adults are expected to be in continuous adaptation to new circumstances in order to follow the technological, economical and social advance.

CRVCC (Centers of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Skills) also changed its definition to NOC (New Opportunity Centers) and later on, between 2008 and 2010, we verify its progressive expansion due to external consequences (e.g. employability, professionalism, education levels) and an individual level approach (by the discourse of individual's life experience and its recognition of acquired skills). Between 2006 and 2010, NOC almost doubled its structures (270 in 2006; 454 in 2010). (<http://www.novasoportunidades.gov.pt/np4/estatistica>)

3.2. EXPERTS PERCEPTION

Currently, NOC are a naturalized subject present in the daily public discourse and they are strongly emphasized by media. Additionally, they have become a key issue both in casual and non-formal conversations. On one hand, its positive aspects are enhanced and translated in its progressive amount of institutions, which also promotes more job offers. But, contrary to this scenario, there are negative aspects that are constantly being reinforced, such as the facilitator label of this process that allows getting quick scholar certificates in an easy way.

Departing from this national framework, we questioned experts about AET framework, its explicit social-political project and conception of citizenship. We could verify that their visions differ.

Considering the Evaluation of RVCC System, expert 2 reveals a wider and consistent point of view, stating that *"I believe it became with too many cognitive demands, too much encyclopedic, perhaps"*, while expert 1 shows a tenuous opinion towards this category: *"what we can expect is to have a plausible evaluation"*.

As far as the role and function of NOC is concerned, expert 1 highlights the function of exert a *"personal, civic and cultural"* influence, as well as the feeling of *"citizenship"*. Though, expert 2 clarifies that RVCC as *"(...) an effect that is undeniable and which may have repercussions after the process and not so much during the process."*

Analysing the impact of NOC in adults, experts consider that this one is positive due to *"the social capital that will have good returns"* (expert 1). Besides it, there is an engagement in lifelong learning once that adults *"leave with the willing to continue to learn wherever and however it may be, such as those who leave the 9th grade and start asking «where do I sign to the upper secondary?»"*

On experts view, the conception of citizenship which is present in NOC reveals the *"marriage between two tradition of education: to enable citizens to be more active, more*

creative; and to see a different conception in education, to prepare people for the needs of the economy, for the world of work.” (Expert 2)

3.3. ADULTS POINT OF VIEW

To these adults, Citizenship has a diffuse conception. They refer that *“citizenship is all of the things”*. They also stress that there are *“acts that may change the future of our future, like recycling and don’t throw away garbage into the floor”* and associate it to concepts like respect, freedom of speech, duties and rights. Though, some opinions highlights that *“we have more duties than rights... Rights are a little bit limited.”*

Regarding participation issues, these adults reveal that *“we have a lack of people who manifest themselves when they disagree with something”*. Similarly, adults indicate that there is a lack of critical conscience as well as an informed decision-making once they realize that *“people had to vote for a political party or an ideal that they felt it was right and not null.”*

Considering participation experiences, we verify that there is still an oppression going on once that they *“have afraid to on strike”*. On the other hand, we have also found adults that enhance characteristics of the dictatorial regime and its control: *“today we have no respect towards all institutions, by the police, by older people... Considering my father’s story and thinking, we now have too much freedom”*.

Their discourse also clarifies that this oppression influences their expressions and ways of dealing with problems. Regarding these conclusions, they say that *“when I have problems, I try to ignore it and go around it”*.

When we focus on their participation and involvement in their community, they reveal some apathy once that *“(…) what is certain is that neither he does nor the other”*. When they actually participate, they usually do it in *“scouts group”*.

4. CONCLUSION

Our findings show that through time, NCO and lifelong learning policies have become extremely politicized. In this sense, RVCC process has been a constant target of both media discourses and politicians from opposition parties, which, combined to a generalized social lack of information about this process, promotes its non-recognition. Adult’s point of view about citizenship issues reveal that even 37 years after our establishment of democracy, Portuguese still demonstrates signs of oppression in their jobs and in their daily live.

In order to transform citizens as authors of their lives in his country it should be promoted a critical and reflexive conscience that could enable adults to think and express themselves freely as well as assuming themselves an important role and contribution to local and global society. In this sense, NOC could be a vehicle to promote citizenship, adult participation and democratic experiences in a wider level.

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