

State Responsibility for Fostering Participation and Social Justice. Some Reflections on Policies for Low Skilled Adults in Portugal and Italy

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Abstract

This article aims at discussing the state responsibility concerning educational rights as a framework to problematize issues of social justice on two national contexts of South Europe with an expressive vulnerable adult population concerning qualifications. We supported our analysis of national ALE public policies on Tomaševski (2001) theoretical and analytical framework that focuses on the accomplishment of the right of education by national states. Research goals are to analyse and compare ALE as a human right in the context of both states obligations, and to qualitatively evaluate selected national policies as fostering participation and social justice. This article responds to the follow question: what are the national policies that contribute to express ALE as a human right and why? It presents the scenarios obtained through Tomaševski model and point out to interesting differences between Portuguese and Italian cases.

L'articolo esamina il tema della responsabilità degli stati in materia di diritti educativi, quale quadro di riferimento per problematizzare le questioni di giustizia sociale in due contesti nazionali del Sud Europa, caratterizzati da una popolazione adulta vulnerabile con basso livello di qualificazione. L'analisi delle politiche pubbliche nazionali relative all'educazione e all'apprendimento adulto (ALE) si fonda sul framework teorico e analitico di Tomaševski (2001) che permette di valutare come gli stati nazionali realizzino concretamente il diritto all'educazione degli adulti. Gli obiettivi sono analizzare l'ALE come diritto umano, confrontando la situazione di entrambi gli stati, e valutare qualitativamente alcune politiche nazionali selezionate che hanno inteso promuovere la partecipazione e la giustizia sociale. Questo articolo risponde alla seguente domanda: quali sono le politiche nazionali che contribuiscono ad esprimere l'ALE come diritto umano e perché? Esso presenta gli scenari ottenuti attraverso il modello di Tomaševski e segnala le differenze significative tra Portogallo e Italia.

Keywords: Adult Education and Learning; Human Rights; State Responsibility; Participation and Social Justice; Vulnerable Adults.

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1. Introduction. Key educational actors in democratic contexts: the state and international organizations

State responsibility, together with the responsibility of international organizations, is a cardinal institution of international law. However, this is not our focus. We use the idea of responsibility in the sense that Tomaševski (2001) has suggested when she refers to the governmental obligations to create concrete conditions to allow the accomplishment of human rights for their own population.

This rationale demands the awareness that the modern state, as political entity, acts intentionally under a government to organise a political community (Vincent, 1992). However, this entity has suffered several redefinitions in recent times (Ozdogan & Tokay, 2000). Therefore, in the global policy contemporary context, the modern democratic state's acts responds to the pressures applied to it by a diversity of organized interests (Dahl, 1983).

International organisations, particularly the governmental ones, have flourished after the Second World War and became recently influent actors, pursuing the common interest of the membership, into the field of lifelong learning policies around the world. Indeed, they set strategies, affecting national public policies through the establishment of guidelines, programmes and standards. Thus, mostly international agendas (OECD, 2012; EC, 2016) highlight that investments in adult education and learning are primary strategies toward overcoming the great contemporary challenges of social disintegration, unemployment, poverty, and individual insecurity. Education and training over the life-span can enable workers to stay in the labour market improving their positions (Kilpi-Jakonen, 2014) and creating new opportunities for their competences and jobs. ALE is considered a key issue in promoting citizenship, equality, inclusion, tolerance and employability, allowing individuals' active and responsible participation in society as citizens (Gadotti, 2016). But ALE also acts as a booster for freedom and in dignifying individuals (Milana, Holford, & Mohorcic Spolar, 2016), contributing to their personal fulfilment (Tomaševski, 2001) along the whole life paths. In this sense, education is a goal in itself. Therefore, being one of the few International organisations embracing this rational, UNESCO¹ (2016) has addressed its recommendations to national governments for them to assume state responsibility, and take specific measures targeted to guarantee ALE as a human right, becoming a key educational actor for furthering democratic and humanistic contexts in today's world. The Recommendation supports the Education 2030 Framework for Action (UNESCO; 2015a, 2015b) and believes ALE as an important factor linked to the 17 goals for peace, prosperity, global cooperation against the poverty for the Sustainable Development.

2. Methodology of the study

The aim of this article is to answer the following question: what are the national policies that contribute to express Adult Education and Learning (ALE) as a human right? In what way is it possible?

The documental (in both cases) and empirical (only in the case of Portugal) data have been collected mainly in the context of an international ALE research² that both authors have worked on. Data interpretations are based on a qualitative and comprehensive approach (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The decision to assume a different scale of analysis came from having two different national realities in the political scenario of ALE. Thus, in the Portuguese case, it was possible to select a policy that has created concrete and disseminated practices in the field, since 2001, in all the national territory. This has made possible to use a macro and micro analysis. In the Italian case, the analysis is at the meso level because of a different deployment of the policies and of a national delay in the implementation of ALE practices compared to Portuguese ones. As we compare the accomplishment of ALE as a human right in the

1. Within the United Nations, UNESCO "is responsible for coordinating international cooperation in education, science, culture and communication. It strengthens the ties between nations and societies, and mobilizes the wider public so that each child and citizen". This international organisation includes currently 195 members working within national commissions; 10 associate members represent territories and groups of territories (<https://en.unesco.org>, retrieved 8.12.2017).
2. EURE.K – *Validation des Compétences-clés Européennes*, 2015–2018. [This is an ERASMUS+ project: 479A0AF7447AC35B]. See <http://www.eure-k.eu/wakka.php?wiki=Accueil>.

context of both states obligations and as we intend to qualitatively evaluate selected national policies presented in public discourses as fostering participation and social justice, these different scales used in our analytical lenses does not affect the goals of this article.

Having this methodological path on mind, research techniques preferred are documental analysis of recent or more significant policies and programmes existing in the Portuguese and Italian agendas that could be seen as presenting guidelines for ALE in a human's rights scope. The result pointed different situations. In the case of Portugal, there is a major policy, with consolidated policies and practices: the recognition of prior learning (RPL); in the case of Italy, there are three major policies, without consolidated practices: the "150 hours" measure; the creation of the Permanent Territorial Centres for Education and Training of Adults policy (CTP); the Provincial Centres of Instruction for Adults reform policy (CPIA).

As the recognition of prior learning (RPL) in Portugal has already been the object of an ethnographic past research made by one of the authors (Barros, 2009), some empirical testimonies data of past research are also used here, in a rational of complementarity with more recent empirical collected data, that have been object of content analysis (Bardin 1977, Krippendorff 1989).

The general analysis, that provides support for the interpretations presented in this article, was made according to the first stage of Reischmann's and Bron Jr's argument (2008). Namely, operating a juxtaposition of Portuguese and Italian selected policy agendas on ALE, for the last four decades. This exercise allowed the identification of similarities and differences in the results of the applied Tomaševski 4-A scheme.

3. Responsibility, social justice and the right of adults to education

The main focus of this article is a call for the fundamental and inalienable right of adults to education. Around the world different realities of social inequalities and injustices give rise to different opportunities of access to literacy and elementary education. Consequently, as Benavot (2015) highlights, there is also an unequal distribution of access to the 'dynamic nexus' of social relations, communication and praxis.

Considering that advancing human rights as a framework in the educational political arena is a process, and having as point of departure the Article 26.2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that states:

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the UN for the maintenance of peace.

Then a vision of educational policy and governance as a vehicle for promoting the human right to adult learning and education (ALE) as something more than compulsory and free elementary education emerges. Here we agree with Tomaševski:

The importance of the right to education reaches far beyond education itself. Many individual rights are beyond the grasp of those who have been deprived of education, especially rights associated with employment and social security. Education operates as a multiplier, enhancing the enjoyment of all individual rights and freedoms where the right to education is effectively guaranteed, while depriving people of the enjoyment of many rights and freedoms where the right to education is denied or violated (2001, p. 10)

As Paulo Freire (2006) has showed, ALE becomes a condition for freedom by encouraging critical thought about unequal power structures. Thus, embracing this framework we discuss through two national cases the role of ALE in contributing to the social justice by challenging the root causes of exclusion and giving confidence to the illiterate or poorly educated adults to find ways to have a voice

in the public arena (Gadotti, 2011). As the UNESCO's 2015 *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education* underline: "the aim of adult learning and education is to equip people with the necessary capabilities to exercise and realize their rights and take control of their destinies" (p. 8). This fundamental position gives us a lens through which we see, together with Grant and Gibson (2014), in the language of human rights "a mandate for education that contributes to self-realization and to a flourishing and whole life" (p. 95). Indeed, this was the essence of the vision in Faure UNESCO's 1972 report: *Learning to be – the world of education today and tomorrow* that has established since then a base for humanistic policy agendas for ALE in several contexts engaged to promote lifelong education for all.

In this article we are interested in analysing the ALE agenda of two south Europe national cases, which have an expressive low qualified adult population. The aims of the article are to understand: i) which kind of national policies exists that could express this humanistic scope, and ii) how those practices contribute to empower adults 'to read the world' (Freire & Macedo, 1987) and engage in transformative educational lifelong projects (Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2009). Inclusive and integrated policies can generate democracy and human rights, reducing social inequalities (Mayo, 2015).

By taking the UNESCO's 2015 Recommendation on ALE that sets: "all Member States, according to their specific conditions, governing structures and constitutional provisions, should develop comprehensive, inclusive and integrated policies for adult learning and education in its various forms" (p. 8), then to make ALE a human right is first a responsibility and obligation of democratic governments. As Tomaševski's put it "the conceptual counterpart of human rights are then governmental obligations. Governments are individually obliged to secure human rights for their own population" (2001, p. 8).

Adopting this main scope, we agree with Vargas Tamez (2012) when he said that Tomaševski's 4-A scheme (2001, p. 13–15) represents a useful tool to analyse ALE as a human right in the context of states obligations, and to evaluate national policies and programmes in this field. In short, this 4-A scheme assume that governments have to make education available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable. Thus, we supported our analysis of national ALE policies on Tomaševski proposal, which highlight the accomplishment of the right of education by national states. This theoretical and analytical framework has been used here as suggested by Vargas Tamez, through several key questions (2012, p. 44–45) that had oriented our analysis and discussion of selected policies and programmes in Portugal and Italy.

4. Participations and Social justice: some reflections from the Portuguese RPL policy and practices agenda concerning low skilled adults

During the last four decades (democratic period), literature has pointed that the Portuguese ALE policies have been insufficient and mostly contradictory. Even so, a common aspect seems to be present: all political agendas agreed about the problem of under certification of the Portuguese adult population. In effect, in 2001, when a turning point in the scenario of ALE public offer was observable, the levels of school certification were very low. According to public data of the National Statistical Institute, in 4.892.000 active population, 8,9% have no instruction, 33,9% have only 4 years of basic education, 21,4% have 6 years of basic education, 14,6% have 9 years of basic education, and just 12% have the secondary education level of instruction. So, 55,3% of alphabetized active adults did not have complete basic education but manifest extraordinary professional and life experience. In a concomitant way the levels of dropout at schools remains high, occurring in urban areas but especially in peripheries and rural areas, been very much connected with vulnerable families with problems of social exclusion, unemployment and poverty.

In been targeted for vulnerable adults with low or no qualifications and keeping the broad pedagogical scope, the recognition of prior learning (RPL) policy in Portugal has taken the right of adults to education and participation in lifelong education as a path for increasing social justice. The main expression of this has been the innovative characteristics of the practices of ALE that have chosen to give value to experiential learning and foster participation in educational projects by previous excluded adults. In this context, provide counselling and guidance has been a major priority for the adult educators. These professionals were trained by national public initiatives to engage in RPL processes in a pedagogical and

holistic way. Thus, effective contributions in promoting social inclusion have been made by means of personalised guidance and support provided before, during and after validation (Barros, 2011; 2016). Using Tomaševski 4-A scheme we see that Portuguese RPL policy has made ALE acceptable because the quality of the process has also obeyed to a carefully designed national chart of quality for RPL and the methodology has been adequate to the needs and interests of adults.

In a low-income context, it is also important to highlight that there has been no cost for RPL candidates in Portugal, and RPL can also be organised in an itinerant way, with adult educators doing sessions in local associations, recreational clubs, parish boardrooms, etc. with the intention of helping populations with accessibility problems, with less resources or with other limitations. Further, it has been developed a specific system of guidance for immigrants, implemented in cooperation with the High Commissariat for Migrations in national and regional centres of support for immigrants. In recent years, foreign workers arriving in the Country have used the RPL to upgrade their qualifications as well. There was also a specific RPL procedure for the disabled, at the basic level (nine years of school) in the Inclusive RPL Centres. A specific methodological guide was created for practitioners to develop the RPL process for disabled candidates, oriented to specific disabilities: mental disability, sensorial disability, blindness and deafness, neurological diseases, mental health, and learning difficulties. Using Tomaševski 4-A scheme this means that Portuguese RPL policy has made ALE accessible as well as adaptable.

The main methodology used in Portuguese RPL processes integrates several phases, each of them have been based on a balance of competences and a biographic approach. Consequently, the best practices of RPL, for adults with low school levels but high professional and life experience, have been recognised in academic research literature for been conducted in accordance with the specific rhythms, and conditions, of each adult and for give rise to a portfolio been developed in a permanently accompanied way (Barros, 2014a; Barros, 2014b; Cavaco, 2009; Guimarães, 2011). Since the creation of this educational modality Portuguese adults learners can go through a RPL process in two main routes that can be followed in a separate (single certification) or in an integrated way (double certification): a) the academic process, aiming to improve the qualification levels of adults who do not have basic or secondary (twelve years of school) education certificates, b) the vocational process, for adults who do not have formal qualifications in their occupational areas, aiming to improve vocational qualification levels of beneficiaries.

One of the most expressive facts of the national scenario of ALE has been the participatory levels obtained in RPL, which have made of this reality a study case for policy-makers (Capucha, 2014). According to the National Council of Education, in 2010 there were more than 1 million adults enrolled in RPL processes and 386.463 already certified. Between 2005 and 2012 the national network of RPL Centres has expanded to over 500 units in all territory, and over 12000 adult educators were acting in this system (CNE, 2011). Using Tomaševski 4-A scheme this means that Portuguese RPL policy network of centres has made ALE also available.

A background of evidences have been produced and published, that highlighted the contradictions of national ALE system but also, and specially emphasized the emancipatory contribution and originality of the RPL offer, particularly derived of the option of focusing the process on the low academic-skills adults and on his/her life experience, valuing “self (re)cognition” and drawing it out to be the carrier and anchor of life projects for and with a future. A brief selection of testimonies and data sources from interviews collected on a past critical ethnographic study (Barros, 2009) are presented to better illustrate some of the results that allow us to argue that RPL matters as a social justice resource for vulnerable adult learners.

Indeed, one of the most frequent affirmations of those vulnerable adults involved in RPL was related with the positive impact on their personal and social lives resulting of a reinforcement of self-esteem. They referred regularly the surprise caused from the self-discovery that they knew more than they realise, and coming from the fact that experiential knowledge could have a social value,

at beginning I was expecting classes like in school... I could not see how my life could be important [...] they helped me to understand the value of all my experiences, especially as mother, but also on dressmaker and cake cooker for neighbourhood [...]. I feel more like a valid person myself now! (E7)

My family was poor and I dropout school very early because money was needed for food at home [...]. I have been (30 years) in France, where I always have done whatever was needed, teaching others about any task of the job [...]. Back here I became unemployed and felt devalued... so I have done the RPL and showed everyone I am still clever as well... (E6)

after the accident, I got retired and it was a nightmare... It was as if I did not belong to society anymore! [...] a friend challenged me to make the RPL process and I laughed... but after a while I did it, and within the process I realise my life did not ended, but just changed... I have plans to begin e-learning and reinvent myself again (E3)

These selected testimonies of past research have highlighted essentially the positive effects of the RPL process on the individual self-esteem, self-worth and self-knowledge, reconstructing life plans and, in some exclusion situations, facilitating employability. This confirmed the external public evaluations and analyses made to the Portuguese RPL system (CIDEDEC, 2004; 2007; CESOP, 2009; ANQ, 2011). The evidences of one year of participant observation (between 2004 and 2005) and data from the current research project on RPL (between 2015 and 2018) also confirmed the value attributed by these vulnerable adults to the possibility of being permanently accompanied by adult educators in the Centre, and having a purveyor's office, facilitating guidance or access to other learning and training opportunities (Barros & Ferreira, 2018). Although the percentage of people that returned to formal studies is low, the RPL process seems to motivate people to pursue formal education, at least in terms of raising expectations.

After I have done the RPL for basic school I felt more confident of my capacities! And when the Centre could start the process for secondary school I haven't taught twice... [...] I could never imagine myself thinking of higher education, but now I am sure I will study to become a nurse! (Evii)

Adult learners acknowledge the features of the validation process itself and its impact in their lives and restored a sense of hope. The improved participation in civic life is also a perceived benefit for individuals.

5. Participation and Social Justice: some thoughts from the Italian policy historical agenda for low skilled adults

The results of the Research Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC, 2014) promoted by the OECD in the period 2011–12 have shown that Italy placed last among the 24 countries taking part in the survey in the literacy competence. The average score of Italian adults (16–65 year), amounts to 250: 23 points below the OECD average (273), 29 below Sweden, 38 below Finland and 46 points below Japan. Data referring to adults' numeracy competence show that Italy (247 points) is the second worst ahead of Spain, with a gap of 22 points from the OECD average (269), 32 from Sweden, and 41 from Japan (288 points).

Italy (ISFOL, 2014) has a very high percentage of adults low-skilled shifted towards the lower level of instrumental literacy: 70% of the population scores between level 2 and below 1 (42% at level 2; 22% at level 1, with a 6% of illiterates below the level 1). Within the nation, performance levels are differently distributed. There are differences in different geographical areas of the country and differences among cohorts, in particular, between the average of the mature class (55–65 years) and the younger one (16–24 years) that with a percentage of 75% is at the level 3 out of 5.

The comparison with the OECD average highlights the delays and the problems of Italy regarding this domain: ALE has never been considered a social priority or an educational requirement for the country. Adult education has long been conceived as a form of instruction limited to illiterate adults, who need to obtain the compulsory school certificate.

During the Seventies, with the so-called "150 hours", the first turning point toward a new direction is marked. In 1973 the 150 hours are not a national public measure of the Italian state, but they emerge as a form of right to study conquered by the workers through the labor struggles of that period. Gained as the article 28 of the National Collective Contract of Metalworkers, the 150 hours are then extended

to other professional categories and services. For the first-time emphasis is placed on education and learning that are considered as the main ways to improve adults' own education, culture, participation in social life and knowledge, no longer identified with the mere basic literacy (Marescotti, 2017).

The 150 hours guarantee the ALE for the first time. This period paid by employees and distributed over three years, permitted low skilled adults to obtain their secondary school certificate or to complete their compulsory education. The 150 hours wasn't included in the formal system of education, but this non-governmental measure is the first form of continuing education in which the right to education is primarily recognized to Italian adults.

Almost 25 years since the 150 ore, in 1997, the formal educational system introduces a national measure to cope with the problem of low skilled adults, both native Italians and new immigrants. The Permanent Territorial Centres for Education and Training of Adults (CTP) were formed exactly as state institutions according to the lifelong learning framework and to the Europeanisation of the policies. The educational need remains the same as well as the aim but focused on different adults' target: the increasing demand of Italian literacy by immigrants. CTPs were a branch of the compulsory school dedicated to adults: spread locally and worked in the late afternoon and evening. Without having their own headquarters or teachers specifically trained or committed, CTPs were hosted in the compulsory schools, the mornings used for the youth. The CTPs developed continuing education programs offering some basic courses to the adult population. Meanwhile, CTPs didn't have autonomy in managing adult education programs because ALE wasn't considered a priority issue by the Italian government. Beyond the acquisition of instrumental skills, that have always been the problem of the Italian adult population, CTPs for the first time respond to a demand of training necessary to participate in civil society, in social life and to exercise the rights as citizens. They are inspired by the idea of the lifelong learning, spread by Unesco and OECD and by a systemic vision centred on adults' continuous possibility/potential of education (Cornacchia, 2013). However, in 10 years, the results of the CTP's activities have reached only 2.5% of a potential basin of about 12 million adults with a middle-school license and about 4 million without primary school degree (TreElle, 2010). This data appears to be very significant considering the findings of the PIAAC Report. In CTPs there was also a different type of adult target: 72% are foreigners attending Italian basic literacy courses; 28% are Italians who attend courses in functional literacy (English courses, other foreign languages, computer and digital literacy, cultural activities or arts).

In 2012, the CTPs were transformed in CPIA (Provincial Centres of Instruction for Adults) aimed to the same purpose strictly embedded to literacy issue: the organization of language courses to develop functional literacy both for Italian and immigrant adults; the achievement of a school certificate, or professional qualifications since the compulsory education is until 16 years of age. These courses are now organized nation-wide, even in prisons, and integrated with the formal educational system, with teachers specifically assigned. Nowadays, the CPIAs represent the first real recognition by Italian government that adults need a specific education, with dedicated spaces or sites, accompanied by professionals trained and committed to this purpose. Therefore, CPIAs' activities are mainly addressed to the high number of foreigners who work and live in Italy, but do not know appropriately the language and are poorly integrated into the social and professional contexts.

CPIAs have an organizational autonomy (in courses, teachers, venue) within the territory of each Italian province area. CPIAs are finally considered as a specific sector of the formal education system that, in 2014, recognizes the adult's continuing education as a right of citizenship, that allows them to continue learning in a lifelong vision and in a life-wide logic, contributing to the development of a democratic society.

However, CPIAs inherit the problems of the past. Despite they are based on the idea of a cultural and social equality to secure all levels of the adult population, particularly those in difficulty (Marescotti, 2017), their focus is (again) on literacy—instrumental and functional. The targets are low skilled adults or young adults (aged 16 and above) who have to acquire a qualification for employability or have to obtain a certificate in order to stay in Italy.

The lack of specific initiatives and dedicated structures to raise the level of basic skills amongst Italian adults is strictly embedded to the low results in the International surveys. In the last decades, the lack of attention to the ALE has generated negative consequences because it is related to the inadequacy of the formal Educational System to appropriately develop and to effectively foster ALE as a social and civic

right of the population.

The central idea that seems not to be yet settled is that ALE is not only a reparative measure, but it is a form of education through all life, fundamental and inalienable as a right of adults to fulfill their own lives.

Unfortunately, this poor investment in ALE corresponds to the limited development of national policies on the matter. One Italian example is the outstanding issue of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policies. Differently from Portugal and despite European demands, Italy doesn't have a national system or a formalized process on RPL addressed to low skilled adults or adults with professional career and experience who want to improve their educational or training condition with an accompanied process of tutoring.

According to the 4-A Tomaševski's scheme, the historical excursus on ALE Italian education can permit us to synthetically drive some remarks. Italy was affected by a limited development of national policies or programmes on ALE.

Availability of ALE was guaranteed to workers from the end of the Seventies but operatively extended to the whole territory only at the end of the Nineties. However, the conditions of the infrastructures, the centres, the materials weren't provided to adult courses together with an adequate training of the teachers dedicated to CTPs. The delay or the failure in national policies in giving importance to the ALE negatively influences the criterion of the availability. The second principle, the access to ALE, is probably better positioned. From their establishment, CTPs before and now CPIAs generally focused on open access to all adults of the territory without discriminations (Marescotti, 2014). The inclusion and the participation are two main aims of the CPIA that works equally with Italian people and not Italians. They try to remove cultural and social barriers hampering the access to education, limiting their coasts. The CPIAs program is adaptable to all adults, specifically promoting interculturality as a great value supported by a tradition of openness and tolerance that usually characterizes the country and inspires its educational programmes. Now the challenge is to consider ALE no longer as reparative or inferior path than the other forms of education or training.

The last condition, the acceptability, requires some attentive considerations. In fact, after the closing of the CTPs in 2012, a national report assessing the experience during its 15 years was edited by the Ministry of Education. These data have been very useful in evaluating the CTPs' experience and its impact, its strengths and weaknesses. Meanwhile, after two years of interruption, in the school year 2014–15, the CPIAs have been established. The structure, the aims and the activities are well defined by the national decrees but a national plan monitoring this new experience in ALE or a specific assessment program are not available at the moment. A national network (RIDAP) that associated 70 CPIAs in all the country was created but no national data and evidences on CPIAs are available, except what each 120 CPIAs singularly promote and present in its website.

Therefore, we can confirm that ALE is not yet well recognized and fostered in Italy. Tomaševski's scheme shows that if ALE is perceived as a marginal issue and as an ideal orientation not implemented in effective practices. The adults' right of education seems to be misunderstood and unrecognized throughout the country.

For Italian politicians, educators, teachers and for all adults, there is still much to be done regarding: at macro level, the increase of policies specifically dedicated to ALE included in the formal education system; at meso level, the dissemination of ALE practices as a fundamental part of a broader lifelong learning framework; at micro level, the challenge is really important because it concerns the enhancing of a culture of lifelong education, focused on the idea that ALE is a fundamental and inalienable right to education for each Italian adult.

6. Concluding remarks

Despite the shift from 'Lifelong Education' to 'Lifelong Learning', that characterizes today's global policy in the ALE field of global governance (Barros, 2012) and its correlated tensions and ambivalences in the framework of new public national policies, some attempts have been made in Portugal and in Italy in ALE policies and practices. Although the degree of implementation differs significantly in both countries, the common goal was to develop or expand the social dimensions of learning and education, with

regard to the emancipatory potential of ALE, fostering informed choices capabilities and participation of Portuguese and Italian adults.

ALE as a human right has achieved an interesting point in Portugal. Since 2001, when the Portuguese ALE agenda has been diversified and political options gave value to experiential learning the low skilled adults, we saw participation in lifelong education as a real opportunity. Being previously excluded from the qualifications context, Portuguese adults experienced an increase on social justice by means of the recognition of prior learning (RPL). Nevertheless, the positive general effect of RPL, between 2013 and 2015 the policy of austerity has been used to reverse the investment on the field of ALE. This has conducted to the close of the national network of RPL Centres. However new signs have just emerged recently on the policy agenda and a rebirth of RPL in Portugal is occurring in present times (Programa de Governo, 2015; Programa Nacional de Reformas, 2016; Programa Qualifica, 2017).

But ALE as a human right has still a path to go in Italy. The challenge is to create a public offer of ALE and to build a 'culture of ALE' in the country. Three policies once identified have been the first boost in the direction. However, a real mismatch between policies and practices, in addition to limited governmental measures dedicated, have produced in Italy only a partial appreciation of the values of participation and social justice that characterize ALE. To achieve a policy on ALE that could be available, acceptable and adaptable, the Italian state has to effectively and widely promote ALE.

According to this orientation, the governmental responsibility is not only in the delay of the policies, in the lack of guidelines in Italian ALE or in the scarcity of investments (Barbieri et al., 2014). This great responsibility is in the impact that it generates on a nation's education and training systems, in its workplaces, and in the dynamics of its civil society and then in all the lives of its inhabitants who face the great problems that affected Italy: higher labour market risks, high levels of the youth unemployment rate and of the dropout rate, social increase of the poverty and of the social exclusion.

According to Tomaševski scheme, if we assume that governments have to make education available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable, then we can conclude that the accomplishment of the right of education by Portuguese state has been achieved while by the Italian state it has just be partially realized.

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