Lifelong learning from the ‘70s to Erasmus for all:
A rising concept

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Abstract

This paper will focus on Lifelong learning from a historical perspective, within the frame of the European history of education. The aim is to study the evolution and implementation of the concept of Lifelong learning from the 1970s until today. As main argument the paper will show how the concept has gained impetus and weight, especially since the Lisbon Treaty and the launching of the Europe of knowledge. The sources of evidence will be historical reviews written by Luce Pépin and the pioneers of the Commission, by Anne Corbett who specializes in the field. Having presented a Phd on the subject (which has become a book entitled L’Europe des universitaires) the author will also refer to Lifelong learning highlighted by the experience of Grenoble university. As a conclusion, it will be referred to “Erasmus for all”, a wide range program to be implemented in 2013 which relies on Lifelong learning. It can be seen as a climax in the history of education and training. Erasmus for all will be a huge challenge for a European Union in crisis which sees it as the answer to globalization and its competitive world.

1. Introduction

Lifelong learning is a well-established concept today, notably since the European Union launched its Lifelong Learning programme for the period 2007-2013. Education is no longer attached to a specific period in one’s life but rather seen as a continuous process in a fast changing world. Today’s information society requires citizens to update their knowledge. But where does the concept of Lifelong learning stem from? How has it evolved and above all why has it gained so much impetus?

The purpose of this paper is to explore history in order to study Lifelong Learning as a rising concept while looking at its various definition(s), the vision of the world it conveys and the European programmes which implement it. Grenoble social science university will be presented as a case study. This diachronic story of education through the light of Lifelong learning will be focussing both on actors and networks within a system. It
will encompass the European Union but also international institutions such as UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the OECD.

It unfolds into three parts, from the genesis of the concept and its spreading in the seventies, through the policies’ implementations in the 1990s where it gained impetus, to the new millennium which made it a cornerstone of the knowledge society. Learning from the past to anticipate the future is the ambition of this paper.

2. Methodology

This diachronic study relies on several sources of evidence. The main ones are the historical reviews written by Luce Pépin and the pioneers of the Commission and by Anne Corbett who specialized in the field. Having presented a Phd on the subject now published as a book L’Europe des universitaires (the Europe of scholars) the author will also refer to Lifelong learning highlighted by the experience of Grenoble university. The study is issued from archives and oral interviews led with key actors at European, regional and academic levels.

3. Research finding

The concept of Lifelong learning has evolved from the ancient times to today both in its content and in its use by institutions and educators. Three stages will be developed: the genesis of a concept, the policy implementation of Lifelong Learning in the nineties and its turning point with the coming of the new Millennium, the Lisbon Treaty and the rise of the knowledge society.

3.1. Genesis of a concept

According to Denis Kallen, former OECD officer, the concept of lifelong learning begins in ancient times. He quotes the Talmud and the Old Testament urging people “to learn throughout life”. But according to him, “the 19th century saw the first organised movements that advocated and promoted learning for adults in out-of-school environments”. However it is in the sixties, in a context of students’ demonstrations that the concepts of permanent education (Council of Europe), Learning to be (UNESCO) or recurrent education (OECD) were developed. According to Merle, “it is obviously in the early 1960s that this notion emerged among experts’ debates and in the early 1970s that it begins to prevail in the building of public policies”. What kind of lifelong learning vision do they convey?

The various concepts coined by international institutions (Council of Europe, UNESCO, OECD) “meant moving to a humanistic, right-based and holistic view of education” according to researcher Adam Ouane.

In the Council of Europe, the Council of Culture first introduced the term of “permanent education” in 1966. It was seen as “a fundamentally new and comprehensive concept …an overall education pattern capable of meeting the rapidly increasing and ever more diversified educational needs of every individual, young and adult in the New European society.” In Lifelong learning in retrospect, Denis Kallen mentions that “Permanent education was expected to represent a more effective strategy than the current educational system for promoting equality of educational opportunity.” In the seventies, the Council of Europe issued a series on documents on permanent education.

In 1972, UNESCO followed the trend with Edgar Faure’s report entitled “Learning to be” stressing the right to education for all. According to Denis Kallen this report was inspired by former conferences on the theme as early as 1949 and a report written in 1970 by Lengrand “An introduction to Lifelong learning”. The philosophy was that humanism and internationalism conveyed by knowledge were to prevent war and conflicts.

The OECD chose to put forward the concept of “recurrent education” coined by the Swedish Minister of Education Olof Palme who advocated to alternate education and training to meet labour market needs. At that time, Northern countries’ study circles for adults were leading the way followed by Germany and England.

The debates occurred in a context of students’ demonstration in the sixties and oil crises in the seventies. At a national level, several reforms on education were being implemented (for eg, la Loi d’Orientation in France). At a European level, the first conference of the Ministers of Education in 1971 marked the entry of education into the European Common market, a field until then denied by the founding treaties.
For Altiero Spinelli, European Commissar, “school should no longer be confined to the initial period. It should favour continuous training...” His concern for a coherence between education and continuous training was translated by Henri Janne’s reports on education which served as a base for a European education and training policy. Yet he was ahead of his time. If the Conference of European Ministers of Education adopted the principle of recurrent education in Berne in 1973 and in Stockholm two years later, no effective policies ensued.

In France, Grenoble social sciences university was founded in 1970, in the wake of Edgar Faure’s Loi d’Orientation. Its founding charter encompasses permanent education which is defined as « the individual and collective promotion of adults in need of acquiring or enhancing a training or academic culture during their lifetime ». Contrary to Kallen’s pessimistic view on the “missed opportunity for universities to reorganize their teaching”, Grenoble university has worked efficiently in this area. This may be due to the influence of the Institut d’Etudes Sociales founded in 1950 or to Peuple et Culture (by Joffre Dumazedier, Bénigno Cacérès) an association stemming from the resistance movement and its 1945 manifesto. It states that “The technics of popular education must not be the ones of primary school or higher education. Popular culture is “the culture of classless people who from the top to the bottom participate in a common civilisation.”

Recurrent education became a key concern for the university and its dean, Jean-Louis Quermonne. The 1970 the Grenoble conference on the cooperation of European universities quoted the American model of “open university” as an example to follow. Henri Janne met Jean-Louis Quermonne to write his report on education for the European Commission.

Yet the nineties are a turning point for the rising of policy implementation in the field of permanent education.

3.2. Policy implementations in the nineties

According to Kallen, the climate in the nineties was “not favourable to the somewhat utopian, idealistic philosophy of the earlier lifelong learning paradigms. It was propitious for plainly work and employment related lifelong training programmes.

In the nineties, the concept of Lifelong learning prevailed with the coming up of the knowledge society which required the use of new technologies. International competitiveness built a closer link between qualification and employment. The president of the European Commission, Jacques Delors became a key actor in the promotion of lifelong learning. His white paper on “Growth, competitiveness and employment” (1993), inspired by some of Altiero Spinelli’s ideas, was seen as a cornerstone: “Betting on lifelong learning has become the main framework in which national educational communities should be playing their own parts according to their own assets”. His report to UNESCO entitled “Learning : The Treasure Within” (1996), insists on the four pillars of lifelong learning: learning to know, to do, to live together and to be. According to him, they foster democracy and give meaning to human life.

In this context, the Maastricht treaty (1992) laid down for the first time education as part of the European Union policy (art. 126). The Amsterdam Treaty signed in October 1997 states in its preamble the need to “promote the development of the highest possible level of knowledge for the European peoples through a wide access to education and through its continuous updating.

At intergovernmental level, the signing of the Sorbonne declaration (1998) aiming at promoting a common European architecture of higher education by four Ministers of Education led the way one year later to the Bologna process. More than thirty European countries committed themselves to structuring their educational system into bachelor’s, master’s degree and PhD degrees.

In 1993, the European commission launched its Grundtvig programme. It referred to “the father of the folk high school” (1783-1872) in Denmark in the XIXth century. Popular education was seen in a humanistic perspective which would give workers a social and cultural emancipation and the power to fulfill their own destiny. According to the Commission, “The Grundtvig programme focuses on the teaching and study needs of learners taking adult education and ‘alternative’ education courses, as well as the organisations delivering these services. It aims to help develop the adult education sector, as well as enable more people to undertake learning experiences, notably in other European countries.”
The Leonardo da Vinci programme dealt for its part with vocational training. For the period 1995, the Commission chose to rationalize the 6 programmes into two: Erasmus for education and Leonardo for training. For example in Grenoble, the Leonardo project Biblex (1997-2000) was dedicated to the training of librarians in order to increase access to knowledge and fight against exclusion be it social, physical and cultural. Michel Rocca led the project Valsyndic in the field, a European credit system for vocational education and training concerning Trade unionists. In Russia the economist Marc Bartoli set up a partnership with the Minister of Labour, Economics and Finance to train white collar workers in law, business strategy and management in a context of massive privatization. Pr. Catherine Schneider led several Tempus programmes to train Russian civil servants in international and European law.

With the advent of the new Millenium, Europe was ready enough to strengthen the Lifelong Learning experience.

3.3. A turning point with the new Millennium: the Lisbon treaty and the knowledge society

According to researcher Jin Yang, “we are now living in a fast-changing and complex social, economic and political world to which we need to adapt by increasingly rapidly acquiring new knowledge, skills and attitudes in a wide range of contexts.” The Lisbon strategy can be seen as a turning point in EU policy.

The goal of the Lisbon strategy was to “make the Union the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”. Lifelong learning was put as top priority of the agenda by the Italian presidency in 2003, making the Council adopt a resolution on its impact on social cohesion, competitiveness of human resources. It also became one of the main concerns of the intergovernmental Bologna process. The European Council resolution defines Lifelong learning as follows: “Lifelong learning must be understood as all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skill and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment related perspective.”

The programme Socrates II (2000-2006) set out to “promote a Europe of knowledge by developing the European dimension in education and training and encouraging lifelong learning”.

Before a modest programme, the programme Grundtvig (for adult education) became in 2000 an action with the aim “to provide adults with more ways to improve their knowledge and skills, facilitate their personal development and boost their employment prospects.” It also helped to tackle problems associated with Europe’s ageing population. The action addressed a wide range of organizations from the educational, policy-making, business and NGO’s world to promote mobility and networking. The Lifelong learning programme (2007-2012) made education and training become part of a larger scheme: school education with Comenius (13% of the budget), Higher education and advanced training with Erasmus (40%), vocational education and training (25%) and adult education with Grundtvig (4%). It relies on four activities: policy development, language learning, ICT and dissemination. In the field of ICT, the Grenoble urbanist Jan Tucny set up a virtual campus project called OIKODOMOS on housing and urban planning. As for policy development, Michel Rocca worked on a European passport of Union leaders’ skills with Madrid, Rome, North London and Budapest universities in a 2003-2005 Leonardo project. European credit transfers in the field of VET was developed in 2002 by the Copenhagen Process and enforced as a legislation in June 2009 by the European Parliament. In the same trend, but at international level UNESCO’s Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) was set up in 2006 to work in the field of recognition, validation and accreditation.

3.4. Conclusion

Today’s European educational issues are: an ageing society, global competition, slow growth and structural unemployment. For 2014-2020, “EU 2020, the European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” plans an integrated programme called “Erasmus for all”. Lifelong learning is defined accordingly: “all general education, vocational education and training, non-formal education and informal learning undertaken throughout life, resulting in an improvement in knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective, including the provision of counselling and guidance services.” Erasmus for all should allow 5 million people to receive EU grants to study, train or volunteer abroad.
The lobby “civil societies” shares the view that the focus on economics and labour market should be challenged to be replaced by active citizenship and individual well-being. European values, equal access to education and training for illiterates, migrants and rural population should also be stressed. The humanistic and utopian view of recurrent education seems to be fashionable again. Researcher Roberto Carneiro follows the idea that a new social contract towards full citizenship should be built. The end of the Welfare state and a growing economy should justify it. The contract should tend towards “full citizenship standards, striking a right balance between duties and rights, by increasingly calling upon values such as justice, fairness, equity and solidarity in both our national and international orders.” Learning is a treasure to be shared by all.

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References


