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Formation of Adult Education Policy from a European Perspective

Abstract: In the paper, the author provides his opinion on the idea of Europe as a space for developing a European education policy that addresses common European issues. By using the concept of the Europeanisation of education as a methodological tool, emerging European adult education policy is analysed thoroughly. With its formation, adult education has markedly gained in importance and recognition, however it has primarily strengthened only the economic goals of adult education in the EU. European adult education policy is critically analysed at the following four levels: at the level of the purpose that is ascribed to adult education, at the level of construction of valuable knowledge, at the level of formation of desirable forms of subjectivity, and at the level of governance of adult education.

Key words: adult education, education policy, European adult education policy, Europeanisation of Education.

Introduction

Globalisation and the social, economic and political changes relating to it influences today's educational policies and practices on many levels; changes are visible at the economic, political, cultural and other levels (e.g. Ball, Dworkin, & Vryonides, 2010; Burbules & Torres, 2000; Mayo, 2014). However, there is no simple answer to the question of how globalisation influences education policy and practice throughout the world, because the effects of globalisation on education are manifold and contradictory (Dale, 1999). On the one hand they can undermine the sovereignty of nation states, educational institutions and democratic decision-making, while on the other they offer possibilities for the democratisation of public spaces, active citizenship and spaces for the potential transforma-

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tion of individuals and groups. They can encourage instrumental, performative, measurable and (globally) applicable knowledge, or a “knowledge-based economy”, but via information and communication technologies, social movements and local-global networks, knowledge can also serve to empower individuals and groups and support various transgressive practices that have the potential to resist the established order (cf. Biesta, 2006; Usher & Edwards, 1994).

Education policy has internationalised under globalisation processes and become a product of supranational political entities (the EU) and international organisations (the OECD, UNESCO, the World Bank). Some view the latter as “neo-empires of knowledge in education” (Klerides, Kotthoff, & Pereyra, 2014, p. 5) that are endeavouring to enforce precisely defined norms and values and are establishing a “global education policy field” (Ozga & Lingard, 2007, p. 68), in which a coherent range of themes, processes, strategies and discourses is being established at the global level, through which policymakers at the national and international levels are attempting to transform education systems. The transformation of systems is taking place in several ways, for example through the modernisation of individual segments of education systems (e.g. the Bologna reform), through implementation of the concept of globally applicable knowledge (e.g. via the formation of key competences and their verification in the Programme for International Student Assessment and the Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competences), various political instruments (such as the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning, European credit systems, the idea of learning outcomes, quality assurance mechanisms, etc.) and various programmes of the World Bank and the EU (e.g. Lifelong learning, Erasmus+) which provide financial support for the realisation of various reform activities in the field of education.

However, globalisation is not a homogeneous process but one that is associated with three distinct forms of regionalisation – in Europe, Asia and America – each with its own policies and mechanisms. We will focus on understanding these policies and mechanisms in the field of education in Europe, which are being labelled as the “Europeanisation of education” (e.g. Alexiadou, 2014; Dale, 2009; Lawn & Grek, 2012). At the forefront of our interest are the effects of political globalisation, which means that the area of policy is increasingly determined not within the isolated and relatively autonomous nation-states, but is the result of complex interactions at the supranational, international and national levels (Dale, 1999; Milana, 2012a).

The establishment of the EU has significantly influenced education policy, and especially adult education; partly due to the adoption of the concept of lifelong learning in the EU, and partly due to the EU constitutional position, giving

a stronger mandate to the field of vocational education and training. Moreover, within the last decade the EU (specifically the European Commission) has devoted special attention to adult education and learning (Holford & Milana, 2014, p. 4). With the EU, adult education has actually shifted from a relatively marginal field to a prominent one; this shift is being reflected in a change of agenda from adult education to lifelong learning (Holford & Mohorčič Špolar, 2014; Holford, Milana, & Mohorčič Špolar, 2014; Lima & Guimarães, 2011). In this paper, we highlight the process of formation of European educational policy and analyse European adult education policy by using the concept of the Europeanisation of education as a methodological tool. Within this framework we argue that the emerging European adult education policy is fostering above all an instrumental understanding of adult education, knowledge and subjectivity and establishing a new form of governance in adult education.

Europeanisation of education

The concept of Europeanisation first appeared in the 1980s in political studies literature and achieved greater recognition in the 1990s (particularly in the field of European studies), although it does not have a single, clear-cut definition (Klatt, 2014). One of the most cited definitions of Europeanisation is offered by Radaelli, who says that:

Europeanisation consists of processes of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies. (Radaelli, 2004, p. 3)

As noted by Lawn & Grek (2012), Europeanisation represents the process of forming the EU; it is a political and network-based phenomenon and a specific element of globalisation. Europeanisation reflects the complexity of processes that includes, first, transnational flows and networks of people, ideas and practices across Europe, in which European, national and local actors are involved; secondly, the direct effects of EU policy that via the open method of coordination are reflected in the field of education in the establishment of benchmarks, quality indicators and the comparison of statistical data; and thirdly, the Europeanising effect of international institutions and globalisation (pp. 8–9). In this context Eu-

ropeanisation also means the process of successful integration of candidate countries for EU membership and adoption of “European standards” in various fields. The most evident example of this process in the field of education is represented by the implementation of the concept of lifelong learning, since this is supposed to contribute to making the EU the most competitive and most knowledge-based economy (Mohorčič Špolar, Holford, & Milana, 2014; cf. Maksimović, 2011).

At the turn of the millennium discussions of Europeanisation began to encompass education. The majority of authors identify *the Lisbon Strategy* as a key turning point in the Europeanisation of education (e.g. Alexiadou, 2014; Dale, 2009; Lawn & Grek, 2012; Nóvoa, 2010; Pépin, 2007). Through it, the EU set itself a fundamental strategic objective for the coming decade: “to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world” (European Council, 2000, paragraph 5). With *the Lisbon Strategy*, for the first time in history, a direct call for the modernisation of education systems came from the highest level of the EU. *The Lisbon Strategy* identified knowledge and its updating through lifelong learning as a key factor in the future economic and social development of the EU. A consequence of this has been a greater connection of education policy with economic, social and employment policy and also more cooperation in the field of education (Fredriksson, 2003; Pépin, 2007; Rasmussen, 2014). It follows from this that *the Lisbon Strategy* sees education as part of social, labour market and economic policy rather than as an independent “teleological” policy field (Dale, 2009).

We understand the Europeanisation of education as a process in which EU member states, together with the Commission, formulate a policy that becomes “European”. It is a multidirectional process that includes both top-down and bottom-up pressures and the participation of various actors in vertical and horizontal networks and institutions (Alexiadou, 2014). As noted by Klatt (2014), Europeanisation is a three-dimensional concept that includes the infiltration of the policies (rules) of member states at the EU level, the adaptation or transformation of the national policies of member states in accordance with EU policies, and the horizontal exchange of policies among networks of people, ideas and practices throughout Europe involving European, national and local actors.

Within the context of the Europeanisation of education, a “European education policy” that addresses common European issues – closely tied to the fundamental objective of *the Lisbon Strategy* – is being formulated: recognition of qualifications and learner and worker mobility, raising the quality of education and lifelong learning with an emphasis on skills relevant to the labour market and validation of non-formal and informal learning (e.g. Fredriksson, 2003; Rasmussen, 2009; Žiljak, 2008). Considering the historical analysis of the formation

of the EU, Ertl (2006) and Rasmussen (2014) show that the first rudiments of common European education policy can be found as early as the Treaty of Rome in 1957. With this Treaty, the Commission sought to establish principles for common policy on vocational education and training, which was intended to contribute to the more harmonious development of national economies and a common European market².

The Lisbon Strategy, which sets specific future objectives for education systems, states that these objectives can only be achieved at the EU level, since they are a response to common EU problems. The mechanism for achieving these objectives is represented by the open method of coordination (OMC) “as the means of spreading best practice and achieving greater convergence towards the main EU goals” (Lisbon European Council, 2000, Article 37). The OMC is applied in the form of soft law via guidelines, indicators and benchmarks, mutual learning, expert opinions, statistical data, comparability of results, and so on. As a policy instrument it contains quantitative and qualitative instruments which member states use to exchange information on “best practices”, leading to the formulation of national education policies in accordance with these practices. Above all the OMC encourages the discourse of the measurability of education and learning and functions in a manner that helps member states formulate education policies in a “commonly” agreed direction in a field in which (because of the principle of subsidiarity) the EU has no legal competences (Alexiadou, 2014, pp. 127–128; Nordin, 2014, p. 145).

The first step in the implementation of *the Lisbon Strategy* in the field of education was the decision of the Council on the common objectives of the future development of EU policies in the field of education and training (European Commission, 2001). The second step, in which the Commission and the Council established a detailed work programme on the basis of the common objectives, was a document adopted the following year known as *Education and Training 2010* (Council of the European Union, 2002). After the end of the ten-year period addressed by *the Lisbon Strategy* (2000–2010), the Commission also defined a strategy for the development of education and training for the next ten-year period (2010–2020) known as *ET 2020* (Council of the European Union, 2009).

² From the 60s to the early 90s of the 20th century, the objectives of educational policy were mainly related to education and training for the needs of the economy and the mobility of workers, although some programs and projects focused also on non-vocational aspects of education; for example, promoting European citizenship, a “European dimension” in education, etc. (Ertl, 2006; Rasmussen, 2014). With the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 (Council of the European Communities & Commission of the European Communities, 1992), the field of education for the first time in history gained a legal basis at the EU level; Article 126 defines vocational education and training and Article 127 for the first time also defines general education. Both articles exclude any harmonisation of the laws of the Member States in the field of education and introduce the principle of subsidiarity and cultural autonomy.

The latter is part of the broader context of *Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* (European Commission, 2010), a response by the Commission to the growing economic crisis in Europe in 2010.

European adult education policy

At the EU level, adult education as a policy area was relatively late to develop. Ever since 1996 – the European Year of Lifelong Learning – the EU started to pay more attention to the field of adult education (Milana, 2012a). In 2000 the EU issued *A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (Commission of the European Communities, 2000), which threw open the debate on lifelong learning in Europe. The Memorandum states that “the move towards lifelong learning *must accompany a successful transition to a knowledge-based economy and society*” (p. 3) and that Member States’ formal education systems are responsible for ensuring “that each and every individual acquires, updates and sustains an agreed skills threshold” (p. 11), that is, basic skills which are necessary for living in a knowledge-based society and economy. The Memorandum opened up a broad debate and consultation process on lifelong learning in Europe (cf. Gravani & Zarifis, 2014). The same year, the EU established the Grundtvig program, which provided financial support to activities linked to adult education.

Despite this, the first important turning point for adult education did not come until 2006, when the Commission issued the document *Adult learning: It is never too late to learn* (Commission of the European Communities, 2006), which was followed a year later by the *Action Plan on Adult learning: It is always a good time to learn* (Commission of the European Communities, 2007). Both documents were related to *the Lisbon strategy* and *Education and Training 2010* and were intended to contribute to the realisation of both in the field of adult education. Adult education conceptualised as “adult learning” and described as a “vital component of lifelong learning” was meant not only to significantly contribute to European “competitiveness and employability”, but also to “social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development” (Commission of the European Communities, 2006, p. 2). The five main messages from the Commission are to: increase the participation of stakeholders in adult learning; strengthen the “culture of quality” in adult learning; implement systems for validation of non-formal and informal learning, which are associated with learning outcomes and the development of qualifications frameworks; ensure sufficient investment in the education and training of older people and migrants; ensure the quality and comparability of data on adult education, which should be based on Eurostat and

international research data (PIAAC) (pp. 6–10). In order to realise these goals, the above mentioned Action Plan was adopted. The latter set up the framework for monitoring the progress of member states with specific timelines and methods of implementation. For the implementation of the *Action Plan*, the Commission also established a “Working Group on Adult Learning” at the EU level.

A year later these two documents paved the way for the European Parliament *Resolution on Adult learning: It is never too late to learn* (European Parliament, 2008) and the *Council Conclusions on Adult learning* (Council of the European Union, 2008). The Resolution states that “adult learning is becoming a political priority” (European Parliament, 2008, paragraph A) and urges member states “to establish a lifelong learning culture, primarily focusing on education and training for adults, by implementing policies and actions geared to promoting the acquisition of knowledge and making it more attractive and accessible, and permanently updating qualifications” (paragraph 3). It also underlines “the importance of adult learning in order to achieve the goal of creating better jobs in Europe as well as improve quality of life and promote individual development, personal fulfilment and active citizenship” (paragraph 29). In this context it draws attention to the “importance of enterprises forecasting new competences and labour market requirements so that the provision of adult education reflects the demand for skills” and indicates that the “content of education must be tailored to vocational and practical requirements” (paragraph 29). Similar to the Resolution, the Council Conclusions also argue that adult learning can play a key role in “meeting the goals of *the Lisbon Strategy*, by fostering social cohesion, providing citizens with the skills required to find new jobs and helping Europe to better respond to the challenges of globalisation” (Council of the European Union, 2008, p. 3).

These are the fundamental documents formulating European adult education policy in the Lisbon period. In the next ten-year period, which is tied to *Europe 2020*, the fundamental document framing the adult education policy is the *Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning* (Council of the European Union, 2011). The Resolution is aimed at “enabling all adults to develop and enhance their skills and competences throughout their lives” (p. 3). The importance of adult learning for achieving *Europe 2020* goals is emphasised. On one hand, adult learning could significantly contribute to reducing early leaving from education and training to below 10 %, beginning with “literacy, numeracy and second-chance measures as a precursor to up-skilling for work and life in general” (p. 3). On the other, adult learning could also significantly contribute to economic development by strengthening “productivity, competitiveness, creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship” (p. 3). By the end of 2020, the Resolu-

tion should contribute to better recognisability of the field through the following measures: by enhancing the possibilities for adults to access high-quality learning opportunities in order to promote “personal and professional development, empowerment, adaptability, employability and active participation in society”; by developing a new approach to adult education based on “learning outcomes and learner responsibility and autonomy”; by fostering greater awareness among adults that learning is a lifelong endeavour “which they should pursue at regular intervals during their lives”; by developing “effective lifelong guidance systems” and systems for the validation of non-formal and informal learning; by developing high-quality formal and non-formal education and training for adults aimed at “acquiring key competences or leading to qualifications”; by ensuring “flexible arrangements” adapted to the different training needs of adults; by raising awareness among employers that “adult learning contributes to promoting productivity, competitiveness, creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship, and is an important factor in enhancing the employability and labour market mobility of their employees”; by making a strong commitment to promoting adult learning as a mean of fostering solidarity between different age groups, etc. (pp. 3–4).

Challenging European adult education policy

As previously discussed in this paper, adult education became especially important with the formation of European adult education policy. Through lifelong learning, adult education is seen as a key instrument for achieving the objectives of broader European social policy. Although the commitment to lifelong learning improved the status, importance and visibility of adult education in the EU, it primarily strengthened the economic goals of adult education, as well as changing the perspective of education to a broader concept of lifelong learning.

By analysing European adult education policy, we have come to the conclusion that European adult education policy (re-)formulates the understanding of adult education at a minimum of four levels: 1) at the level of the purpose that is ascribed to adult education; 2) at the level of the construction of valuable knowledge; 3) at the level of the formation of desirable forms of subjectivity; and 4) at the level of the governance of adult education.

1) Adult education is part of a broader economic, social and employment policy and plays a key role in addressing the socio-economic, demographic, environmental, technological and other challenges facing the EU. It is ascribed a significant role in the achievement of the Europe 2020 objectives since it is seen as enabling greater productivity, competitiveness and entrepreneurship. For this

reason adult education is becoming a political priority in the EU and represents a fundamental part of lifelong learning policy, within the context of which the emphasis has moved from adult education to adult (lifelong) learning; this should pave the way to a “knowledge society”, the competitiveness of the European economy and greater employability (cf. English & Mayo, 2012; Milana, 2012b; Lima & Guimarães, 2011). Although the promotion of personal development, social cohesion and active citizenship are also highlighted as goals within adult education – goals which have substituted the historical commitment of adult education to democracy, social justice and emancipation – these always appear in the background of the fundamental objective of competitiveness and employability, or as a function of the achievement of this objective (cf. Popović, 2014, p. 192). In adult education, functional goals and measurable outcomes of education and learning have prevailed, resulting in the growing importance of statistical and international comparable data in education (e.g. PIAAC) (cf. Borer & Lawn, 2013).

2) Knowledge is expressed in the conception of a knowledge-based economy, or in the provision of the skills that are essential in order to promote the growth and competitiveness on which the productivity of Europe depends. Knowledge is understood as an investment and a strength that can ensure the “right” skills for the economy in altered social circumstances. The emphasis is on knowledge that can be measured, for which reason references to knowledge alternate with the concept of “learning outcomes”, which are designed to ensure that adults have the skills and competences necessary for the European labour market.

3) European adult education policy is also endeavouring to establish a new form of subjectivity; a flexible subject who is capable of adapting rapidly to a flexible labour market, precarious forms of employment, growing cultural diversity and lifelong learning. Lifelong learning, which emphasises constant learning – learning to update skills, to find employment, etc. – and changes the individual in the direction of desired forms of the self – flexible workers and learning adults, self-actualised individuals, active citizens, etc. – endeavours to optimise the individual’s economic, psychological and social potentials in order to produce “subjects who know”, which is how it defines the “normal” learner, the good worker, the active citizen. Conversely, the individual who rejects lifelong learning – as a participant in education, worker or citizen – is labelled “deviant”. When lifelong learning is connected to the individual responsibility of the individual, the prescribed subjectivity of the “European citizen” is also established; a European citizen is a person who participates in lifelong learning, since this rep-

resents European order, the order of learning (Edwards & Nicoll, 2004; Nóvoa & Dejong-Lambert, 2003).

4) The new form of governance (OMC) that has been implemented in the field of adult education at the EU level aims to improve the coordination of policies and guide reforms in the adult education systems in member states through the use of soft law via guidelines, indicators, benchmarks, and so on. It functions by helping member states formulate their own policies in a commonly agreed direction and enables the transfer of policies from the European to the national level. As a policy instrument it also represents a mechanism of soft governance – a form of governance “at a distance” (Lawn & Grek, 2012, p. 69) – that takes place via the established EU institutions, networks, seminars, expert groups, associations, etc. in which various interest groups participate and formulate adult education “policy” on the basis of statistical data and comparable standards.

A number of critical reflections may be directed towards a European adult education policy conceived in this manner. Such a policy places in the foreground a view of education that is above all instrumental (Biesta, 2006), where adult education is understood as an instrument for the achievement of specific predetermined outcomes and objectives; education is an instrument for the inclusion of adults in a precisely defined order, i.e. the social order of competitiveness, stability and success, and for the establishment of predetermined subjectivities of adults, i.e. good workers, citizens and lifelong learners. In such a concept of adult education, which is designed to increase the productivity of adults and maximise their skills, we recognise above all the realisation of the concept of “governmentality” (Foucault, 2007; cf. Fejes & Nicoll, 2014; Simons & Masschelein, 2006; Usher & Edwards, 1994). Such a conception of adult education also represents a clear departure from the humanistic tradition of education in Europe, in which education has value in itself and knowledge is understood as a value, and leads above all to a “colonisation of the educational world” (Habermas, 1984; cf. Deakin Crick & Joldersma, 2007; Fleming, 2010), in which the language game of performativity and efficiency has prevailed (Lyotard, 1984; cf. Usher & Edwards, 2007). The danger of such a discourse, which reduces knowledge to a single criterion of financial and technological efficiency, is that it affords no room for the acquisition of knowledge that does not only have instrumental value but is essential for the broader intellectual, aesthetic, moral and social development of the adult (cf. Jelenc Krašovec, 2012). In this way, within the universe of possible knowledge, value is only ascribed to specific knowledge and a specific form of its organisation, with the result that this knowledge is legitimised as “official knowledge” (Apple, 2000).

Concluding remarks

In this paper we have shown that globalisation processes have had a powerful impact on the field of education; education policy has internationalised and become a product of supranational political (EU) and international organisations (OECD, UNESCO, World Bank), which has led to the establishing of a global and a European space of education policy. Focusing on European education policy field and using the concept of Europeanisation of education as a methodological tool, we have highlighted the fact that adult education policy is formulated on the basis of complex relationships and dialogical tension between the supranational and national levels, as an exchange of policies, ideas and practices involving European, transnational and national actors. Although the adult education as a policy field has developed relatively late at the level of the EU, it became extremely important with the formation of European adult education policy, and especially with the enforcement of the concept of lifelong learning. However, if the commitment to lifelong learning improved the status and importance of adult education in the EU, it also strengthened the primarily economic goals of adult education. The European adult education policy sees adult education as a direct response to the processes of economic and technological globalisation or as a response to the current socio-economic changes in the EU (economic crisis, unemployment, the aging population). As we have shown, European adult education policy encourages in particular the instrumental understanding of adult education, knowledge and subjectivity. First and foremost it is a concept of knowledge (so-called learning outcomes) which has a useful, effective, measurable and market value. Moreover, adult education represents an instrument for achieving the European order of competitiveness and desirable forms of subjectivity, i.e. lifelong learners and flexible workers and citizens. For the implementation of European adult education policy a new form of governance, which takes place via established EU institutions, networks, seminars, etc. – where various interest groups formulate adult education policy on the basis of statistical data and comparable standards – was introduced. The main threat to such instrumentalisation of adult education lies in its reduction to a system of financial and technological efficiency, which on the one hand reinforces the pragmatic-economistic paradigm of adult education and on the other reduces the ability of adult education to broaden its intellectual, aesthetic, moral, social and political development of adults.

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Stvaranje politike obrazovanja odraslih iz evropske perspektive

Apstrakt: U ovom radu autor izlaže svoje viđenje o ideji Evrope kao prostora za razvoj evropske obrazovne politike koja rešava probleme koji su zajednički za celu Evropu. Uz pomoć koncepta *evropeizacija obrazovanja*, detaljno je analizirana novija evropska politika obrazovanja odraslih. Kada je ona nastala, obrazovanje odraslih je primetno postalo važnije i cenjenije, iako je najpre samo ojačala ekonomske ciljeve obrazovanja odraslih u EU. Evropska politika obrazovanja odraslih je kritički analizirana na sledeća četiri nivoa: na nivou svrhe koja se pripisuje obrazovanju odraslih, na nivou izgradnje korisnog znanja, na nivou formiranja poželjnih vidova subjektivnosti i na nivou upravljanja u obrazovanju odraslih.

Ključne reči: obrazovanje odraslih, obrazovna politika, evropska politika obrazovanja odraslih, evropeizacija obrazovanja.

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