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Is there still a place for social emancipation in public policies?

Envisioning the future of adult education in Portugal

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Abstract

The consolidation of the welfare state in Europe after World War II allowed for the development of adult education programmes aimed at social inclusion, economic growth and democratic citizenship. Lifelong education, proposed by UNESCO (1970s), allowed countries to build adult education policies combining the needs of economic growth and increasing democratic social demands, based on adults' emancipation. In the last two decades, the European Union (EU) orientation for lifelong learning has stressed the formation of education and training to prepare workers to be more productive, and the creation of partnership (public/private) provision, according to managerial rules and procedures. These two distinct political approaches have influenced the evolution of adult education in Portugal. In this paper we argue that the civil society organisations (CSOs) of Portugal today are trapped within a set of technical procedures that have been established in the name of lifelong learning and that EU programmes have made it very difficult for CSOs to escape national state control. This situation impedes innovative and alternative attempts to promote social emancipation.

Keywords: adult education policies; lifelong learning; social emancipation

Introduction

Although there has been broad consensus around the idea that a person learns throughout his/her life (lifelong and life wide), specific perspectives view social emancipation as important for this. Public policies for lifelong learning have mainly

focused on the need to build stronger relationships between the provision of education or training and learning and the satisfaction of economic and labour market needs. An analysis of Western European countries' policies since World War II reveals that the consolidation of the welfare state in many countries allowed for the development of adult education programmes aimed at social inclusion (as adult education was conceived as a social right), and oriented to the preparation of workers for economic growth and democratic citizenship. Lifelong learning as proposed by UNESCO at the beginning of the 1970s represented a political approach for countries that envisioned the challenge of defining adult education policies that combined efforts to respond to the needs for economic growth and for democracy from societies, through aims for emancipation.

In the last two decades, in a context of globalisation, the European Union's orientation to lifelong learning has been refocused. This new orientation emphasises the importance to the private individual of building education and training pathways, the relevance of preparing adults (especially workers) to become more economically productive, and the creation of partnerships and networks of (public and private) organisations in the provision of initiatives driven by managerial rules and procedures.

These two distinct political approaches have influenced adult education developments in Portugal since the 1970s. Recently, the New Opportunities Initiative (a policy under development) follows the European Union's orientation for reform, involving reform in the adult education and training system, the adoption of mechanisms for the formal validation of learning acquired throughout life, and provision through networks of public and private organisations. In spite of experience and knowledge acquired from 1974 up until the 1990s, through adult education initiatives (framed by the national programme and European Union LEADER programme), civil society organisations (CSOs) of today seem trapped in a net of technical and formalised procedures and evaluation obligations. Required through the New Opportunity Initiative in reorienting adult education to lifelong learning, these are procedures and obligations that impinge on innovative and alternative attempts to promote social emancipation.

From the implementation of public policies, emerge changes in adult education that have concrete and significant impact. In this paper, we reveal the corrosive effects of such policies in the provision of adult education, in particular where civil society organisations have been engaged. Our present situation gives us a glimpse of a worrying future relationship between adult education and social emancipation. We end by emphasising a need for the adoption of policy by the European Union and Portuguese government that articulates lifelong education and lifelong learning. In Portugal, such policy would have to take into consideration the non-hegemonic tradition of CSOs and involve the reinvention of social emancipation based on the participation of adults. It would thus involve the valorisation of the needs and problems felt by local people, in the planning of dialogical initiatives.

Shifts in adult education policy

Lifelong education and the welfare state

Public policies based on the idea of lifelong education emerged in Western European countries after World War II. These welfare state policies were built during a period of unparalleled economic growth and full employment. From this period, lifelong education can be regarded a social-democratic initiative (Griffin, 1999a, 1999b), and the

manifestation of a social pact between capital and state regulated labour, linking capitalism and democracy. The connection between economic needs, the democratisation of society and greater welfare became a significant priority of policies (Olssen, 2006). In this, policies have become firmly associated with claims emerging from social security systems. This implicates an increase of social expenses allocated towards the building and functioning of state services that aim to concretise social rights, such as the right to education (Santos & Ferreira, 2002).

These policies for social justice and equality have become privileged strategies for the promotion of social justice and a common good in the building of societies. Over time and through the expansion of public schools, policies turned towards the idea of an *education for all* as a pillar of Western capitalist states' democratisation process. Public policies for adult education, however, went beyond the formal dimension, integrating activities for the promotion of social, political and civic participation. In this sense, and according to Edwards and Usher (1998), there was a clear *differentiation* in the field of practice that included: a) literacy, compensatory education, and the traditional practices of formal education, in some cases already considered as public policies of a modern nation-state; b) vocational training, which served as a determinant factor in the adaptation of the labour force to economic development; c) liberal adult education aiming at social and personal development for civic participation, and taking advantage of civil society organisations (CSOs). For the first time, public policies traversed two different forms of education (formal and non-formal education), enriching and emphasising lifelong education.

The increasing valorisation of adult education in public policy was visible in three areas. First, public policy ensured the financial support for training initiatives and non-formal education activities promoted by state-independent and state institutions. Second, public policy produced a legal framework for adult education that assured financial support in developing the initiatives that were proposed. Additionally, public policy promoted cooperation with and between the organisations that provided adult education activities, placing emphasis on entities involved in social contract negotiations (European Association for the Education of Adults, 2006). As a consequence, this version of adult education, sponsored by the welfare state, emphasised education and training as a state responsibility, and demonstrated a growing concern with respect to the specific forms that encourage a life wide education (Griffin, 1999b).

However, there was public dominium over these policies, characterised by the bureaucratisation and formalisation of administrative procedures and practices. This made for rigidity in their implementation, and a definition of sanctions to ensure social control over the fulfilment of objectives and long-term aims. These policies also entailed the building of a legal framework that aimed at equality in access and the success of public activities delivered through the formalisation and normalization of curricula. Moreover, there was significant professional and administrative control that led adult educators to gradually resemble teachers, in a relationship that began to evolve as one of teaching and learning, rather than educating. This was an effect of *contamination* that adult education began to suffer, by adopting school-like processes that replaced educational practices that had been characterised by diversity and heterogeneity (Canário, 2001). There were similar critiques that soon emanated from academia, civil society organisations and emancipatory social movements. Hence, the emergence of critical perspectives of this functional lifelong education would culminate in a critical social-democratic approach (Griffin, 1999a, 1999b), influenced by authors such as Ivan Illich (1976) and Paulo Freire (1977).

Integrating some of the critiques made by these authors, UNESCO among others played an important role in systematising lifelong education, namely by organising several international conferences on adult education (CONFITEAs) between 1949 and 2009. Lifelong education represented a rupture with the mainstream understanding of education that reduced it to school and teaching. In the Faure Report (Faure, Herrera, Kaddoura, Lopes, Petrovski, Rahnema, & Ward, 1981) the educational systems of industrialised countries were said to be in a crisis: unable to keep up with scientific and technological innovation and ineffective in decreasing social inequalities, despite raising the number of adults engaged in adult education (formal or non-formal). Lifelong education could be considered an instrument in reforming educational systems if it proceeds from the principles of scientific humanism (cf. Lengrand, 1981) and organises learning in educational models (cf. Schwartz, 1976) towards the democratisation of societies and building of a learning society (cf. Hutchins, 1970).

UNESCO defended an innovative combination of formal, non-formal and informal education, and opposed the typical view of education upheld in the linearity of school education. Considering the importance of non-formal and informal contexts in education, one could identify processes that foster democracy and equality of opportunities (Faure et al., 1981). Education was given a new centrality as public policy, as the provision, regulation and organisation of initiatives mainly belonged to the state. As a social right, the state guaranteed equal opportunity to education (Lima, 2007), a condition balancing the fulfilment of individual and collective rights; with this, truly, education became something for all.

It is also important to stress that lifelong education represented a first attempt in building an identity around adult education, by organising and systematising ideas and practices in a field that was inherently diverse and heterogeneous. It was also a first attempt in building a *new educational order*, departing from adult education policies, as argued by John Field (2006). UNESCO defined adult education as a specific identity (Finger, Jansen & Wildemeersch, 1998) that was assumed to be part of a humanistic movement (Finger & Asún, 2001), stressing the importance of development, social progress and innovation through science and technology. This then also incorporated a potential as a liberating project, focused on educational contribution towards the construction of more democratic societies, in which people could be active in and responsive to the world's transformation. Hence, adult education was characterised, according to Ian Martin (2006), as a *social purpose*, because it aimed to create social and political change towards greater social justice, equality, a culture of dialogue developed by the state and social movements, and a better democracy that included a critical reflection on social actions and the political engagements of people.

Lifelong learning, the neoliberal state and the impact of European Union orientations

The economic crisis and a set of major global transformations created a shift in these public policies. Changes were roughly connected to the emergence of neoliberal policies, promoting a new economy based on new “free” market principles in a situation of increased globalisation. Globalization influenced the creation of new international political power centres and the retraction of the state in several social areas. This general scenario has had specific effects on meanings of lifelong education. It has become progressively clear that *lifelong learning* carries new meanings, visible in two key-areas stressed in the Lisbon Strategy (European Council, 2000), namely:

1. To improve employability and the qualification of workers, establish and provide European databases on jobs and learning opportunities to employment

services, and create new programmes that allow the unemployed to access training.

2. To make lifelong learning a priority as a basic element of the European social model, through: new agreements between social partners on innovation and lifelong training; exploring the complementarities between lifelong learning and adaptability (e.g. assuring a flexible management of working time and job rotation); and establishing a European award to companies already advanced in this dimension.

These new functions of lifelong learning are based on the idea that the state is committed to building bridges. Still, the state appears to be transformed into a monitor and controller of conditions that favour the emergence of a learning market, with the aim of delivering more efficient provisions. However, the state seems to be losing its capacity to define policies, while gaining strategic competence in managing established priorities in the short- and long-term. In this sense, the means of education are reinforced, but there is a loss of control of its main aims. In short, there is a reduction in the capacity to determine the results of educational policies, despite the maintenance of a capacity to regulate and adopt compulsory measures (Griffin, 1999a, 1999b).

In a scenario quite different from that of state interventionism, control and results from evaluations seem to dominate public perception. Consequently, there is an appeal to agents and actors linked both to the market and civil society, and an emphasis on facilitating state action by promoting initiatives. This involvement of other partners (non-state partners, even if financed by the state) requires an effort of autonomy, decentralisation and diversification or, as Claus Offe (2005) states, of *pluralisation* and *fragmentation* inside public systems of education and training. However, despite this, an educational market is still not being built. Quasi-markets are emerging, heavily administered by the state in regards to the definition and regulation of public educational provisions, along with funding (even if shared with other agents) and the evaluation of initiatives (Griffin, 1999a, 1999b). These quasi-markets stem from the management of private companies' principles and organisational productivity (Power & Whitty, 1997).

The objectives of public policies move with this shift. Non-formal and informal education connected to socialisation and learning acquired through experience gain importance. In these policies, typical adults are considered as those who learn throughout life in times and spaces that go beyond the boundaries of school; they are considered to be more educated, have a greater life course and a greater level of competence and qualification related to labour contexts, than their counterpart. In short, adults are *competent subjects* (Andersson & Fejes, 2005), possessing experience and specific skills in certain areas. Public policies should therefore look for the links between school and learning contexts outside school. Policies clearly target social groups or sectors through programmes that combat social exclusion and unemployment, and encourage individuals to build their own educational and training trajectories. One of the more important shifts in the meanings afforded lifelong learning involves that of the participation and involvement of people. The individual is afforded new responsibilities in learning how to adapt in the short-term to changes, to choose, make quick decisions and develop competences adequate for economic, educational, work-related and social transformation (Bauman, 2005; Olssen, 2006).

The so-called learning society emerges as an information and knowledge society, demanding adults to be involved in the management of existing information and acquisition of knowledge needed for growth and economic development. This society

fosters a closer connection between education, the economy, and demands for productivity, flexibility and so forth. In this scenario, education (or a so-called equivalent learning and training) is understood as an investment. The analogies between training and financial capital become common in educational policy documents of the EU (cf. European Union Council, 2004; European Commission, 2006).

Shifts in the meanings of lifelong learning afforded through EU policy texts, illustrate a narrowing of the concept and an instrumentalisation of the aims of adult education to economic imperatives that has been linked to an *economisation of social life* (cf. Lima, 2008). Learning is valued for its potential contribution to economic growth and as strategy to increase the potential for individual's to enter the labour market. From the perspective of "work organisations, adult education has become an adequate instrument to increase the competitiveness of enterprises in a globalised world" (Finger et al., 1998, p. 19).

People are encouraged to participate in adult education, so as to survive in a labour market that is increasingly competitive. This reinforces the instrumental character of the market. Opportunities for social mobilisation (a concern of public state policies), on the other hand, depend on the knowledge adults possess and the diplomas they have earned; new knowledge, becomes a requirement to *stay* in the labour market. Knowledge and competences are measured by their utility for people, in terms of the labour market, and as a result, adult education, and especially lifelong learning, reveals its functional and strategic character (cf. Bauman, 2005). According to Peter Alheit and Bettina Dausien (2002), lifelong learning represents a new way to define the educational task in societies. This meaning of learning promotes the re-organisation of educational and training systems towards these changes in work, the new functions of knowledge, and the de-functionality of more traditional educational institutions (i.e. schools); it also stresses the emergence of a new educational economy characterised by the individualisation of knowledge.

In summary, we have identified two major phases concerning the evolution of public policies for adult education. The first one allowed for the emergence and evolution of lifelong education, especially supported by UNESCO; besieged by an historical crisis in education. The second phase is characterised by a shift of public policies as they adapt to macro-contextual factors (such as globalisation; the rise of neoliberal states as they displace the notion of welfare state; EU changing policy, etc.) and promote lifelong learning as their key concept. It is clear that this shift has greatly influenced national policies for adult education, and, at the same time, implementation at local/national levels. The consequences of this shift seems to be a narrowing of the field of adult education: on the one hand, forgetting values that centrally gave birth to it, such as social emancipation and critical action and thought; on the other hand, using adult education as an instrument to mould workers to the new labour market, while legitimating the instrumental character of the neoliberal free market. This being the case, the main aim of the second part of this paper is to examine the Portuguese case in its specificities, analysing it in the light of the theoretical framework just presented.

Looking at Portugal: from policies to practices

From revolution to EEC

The evolution of adult education in Portugal is different from that of many other European countries, essentially because Portugal was subjected to a dictatorship regime from 1926 to 1974 (a coup d'état in April, 1974 and a revolutionary period of about two

years deeply transformed the national scenario). Consequently, while many European countries were building welfare states, Portugal was struggling with dictatorship. Portugal only began to build a welfare state in the 1980s, bringing new structural changes through neoliberal policy. Therefore, and in a short period of ten years, Portugal transitioned from a regime of dictatorship to neoliberalism. Tensions between the two opposite trends carried over through the subsequent decades and resulted in the intermittent confusion of politicians, educational actors and, of course, citizens.

The Portuguese revolutionary period (1974-1976) overlapped with the final crisis the period of modernisation and development that had been critiqued as one of the state's intervention in public life. The language of neoliberal ideology, which had promoted shifts from welfare to neoliberal states in Europe and the USA, started being used in Portugal. Portugal was trapped between changes taking place internationally, and its own, internal, social, cultural and economic changes. It is therefore natural that hybrid or even contradictory features can be identified in the policies this country created or adopted. The contradictory nature of the state and, consequently, of public policies continued for some time and influenced, from our perspective, the development of the paradigms that now frame adult education in Portugal (Guimarães, 2009a).

If there was a certain hope that an effective sub-system of adult education would be created in Portugal in the beginning of the 1980s, the national translation of neoliberal policies associated with technocratic and rational perspectives clearly surpassed the need for investment in education. An obsession with efficacy and efficiency, visible in discourses that emphasised evaluation, precision and products (not processes), began to define the “education that counts” (Lima, 1996, p. 289). As a consequence, adult education became subjugated to formal education and reduced to education as a second opportunity (focused on evening courses that were called “recurrent teaching”). Similarly, adult education became oriented to the production of human capital and qualified labour, mainly due to the impact of EEC funding programmes. Because of this, “popular education and literacy, in its privileged bridges with cultural, civic and political education, with local development and community education, even with the education of adults for the labour world, will be devaluated and, frequently, ignored (...)” (Lima, 2007, p. 27-28).

However, other perspectives emerged from the hybrid policies that were mentioned earlier. In adult education and education more widely, efforts to implement neoliberalism were accompanied by attempts to establish a welfare system. On the one hand, the new General Law of the Educational System, endorsed in 1986, subjugated adult education to formal education; however, on the other hand, there was an effort to widen educational access and increase adult participation. The tendency to link these two different approaches – neoliberalism and welfare – led to the emergence of a *mitigated neoliberalism in education* (Afonso, 1998).

One cannot understand Portuguese adult education without including CSOs in the analysis, which after the 1974 *coup d'état*, became popular education collectives. A strong social movement triggered a push towards adult education and a central state office directed by Alberto Melo put administration at the service of popular education groups with the hope that they could be the basis of a future adult education system (see Melo & Benavente, 1978). When the state rebuilt itself from 1976, these associations were neglected and without support, especially in terms of funding, human resources and technical support. However, even if relegated to a “suspicious ghetto” (Silva, 1990) they did not completely disappear. Portugal's membership to the EEC in 1986 offered new horizons for vocational education, which soon became influenced by pedagogies previously seen only in schools. At the same time, programmes like LEADER, NOW or

EQUAL created finance opportunities for Portuguese CSOs, which soon began to develop an immense number of projects focused on participative methodologies. These projects allowed bottom-up approaches to development and social intervention, supported through the management mechanisms required by the EEC. The local development and participatory research projects that emerged are illustrations of these approaches, and by the same token, we would argue that their fading in the new millennium is a consequence of the implementation of the new adult education policies (Barros, 2009a, 2009b).

During the 1980s, local development in Portugal was guided by the theory and bottom-up activities and processes of popular education, mainly triggered by CSOs (not directly by the central or local state). Our research shows that some of the central characteristics of these local development models were (Fragoso, 2009): i) clear intentions to transform local social actors into agents of development; ii) a strong ideology of militancy, implying that the social actors involved had clear views on the political dimensions of their educational action; iii) bottom-up activities rooted in popular sectors that would provide forms of explicit resistance regarding increased globalisation, while reinforcing local meanings of identity; iv) social change, which was central in these local interventions – success was measured by qualitative changes triggered in communities; v) participation, which was indispensable and integral in all phases of all processes; vi) education, especially adult education, which was central in local development processes.

From the mid-1980s onward it was possible to witness new local dynamics facilitated by CSOs or other institutions. Gradually, however, there were signs that EU policy was about to change, and/or the instruments and financing provided by the EU were progressively making this task of transformation impossible to achieve. But many other CSOs existed beyond the ones that worked in local development. Plus, among CSOs, very different development notions are implied; some were indeed radical and promoted emancipation and social transformation through adult education. Others adapted and reproduced established orientations by both the EU and the Portuguese state. These CSOs reveal a progressive concern with the inter-connections between education (in a reductive sense) and work, along axes established by education, citizenship and competitiveness (Afonso & Antunes, 2001).

Meanwhile, the desert of public adult education was still a fact. This situation took a turn in 1995, as the government made an effort to define a public adult education policy for the future. A team of experts nominated by the government constructed principles as a foundation to build what adult education would come to be. They advised (Melo, Queirós, Santos Silva, Salgado, Rothes, & Ribeiro, 1998) the state to assume the responsibility of creating a national system of adult education through new logics and new, wider, partnerships with CSOs. Central to the development of the national policy, was the creation of an agency that would make concrete and coordinate the implementation of policies in the field. This agency was created in 1999 (ANEFA, National Agency for Adult Education and Training).

Adult education of the new millennium: the hegemony of European Union orientations and the New Opportunities Initiative

The ANEFA created two new forms of provision: the recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) and EFA courses (Adult Education and Training Courses). The central arguments used to justify the need of RVCC were clearly presented: learning processes are not limited to formal situations of education and training. Rather, learning potentially occurs in all areas of thought and action, in one's

personal life, in the family, at the workplace, and in the community. Work, leisure and social interactions are understood as means for learning and producing competences, which are key to personal development (Duarte, 2004). Statistical data shows that in the year 2000, more than three million Portuguese adults had not completed the compulsory nine years of schooling, while about 19% of these people performed professional functions that require some responsibility. This could indicate that in Portuguese society there has not been close correspondence between level of formal education attained and competence level; in other words, schooling does not equip people with the competences that allow them to perform professionally. However, it was the argument of social justice that was emphasised; individuals who demonstrated their acquisition of a set of competences (defined through a competence referential) could have those competences certified by a formal diploma. A network of centres where adults could apply for the recognition of prior learning was created. In 2001, six centres opened, and gradually, the number of RVCC centres increased to 84, in January, 2005. These centres were promoted mainly by those CSOs that could integrate competence certification into wider processes of adult education or social intervention.

The same concept of key-competences was used to structure EFA courses that allow a school certification and a professional qualification. These were constructed for adults living in marginal situations, or at risk of social exclusion or socially excluded. These courses are composed of general modules as well as a strong, specific training phase that aims at building competences around a particular professional profile. The work is undertaken according to innovative models of real-life themes decided upon by the group of learners and includes a mediator who is fundamental to pedagogical processes. The last phase of such courses provides participants with the possibility to include learning in real-labour contexts.

The role of the ANEFA in the context of Portuguese adult education was characterised by some structural contradictions. The importance of creating new and widened public services to adults is not disputed, but the distance between the original recommendations of the 1998 expert group and the concrete outcomes of the ANEFA is very large. This agency was able to implement two of the ten proposed measures that appear in Melo et al. (1998) neither of which was central to the group that produced the document. The ANEFA's work assessment depends more on the measures that lack than on the existing ones. This Agency represents the beginning of a gradual narrowing of the humanist agenda for adult education in Portugal (potentially characterised by social emancipation), because of the individualist conceptions it proposes and the ambiguous delimitation of state intervention. That is, the core of the ANEFA's action was based on strong appeals made to CSOs' actions. It constructed the rules while assuming a mediator's *status*, however, both RVCC centres and EFA courses were developed (and in a certain sense, even interpreted) by CSOs. There is a real danger that this type of contract transforms CSOs into vehicles of state policy, simultaneously questioning the central mission of CSOs and the major aims of a public social policy, which targets economic and employment dynamics. Finally, the specific linkage between education and training proposed by the ANEFA tends to subordinate educational principles to those of training: heavily school-framed and seeking to promote competitiveness, flexibility and a wide adaptation of the Portuguese labour force (Canário, 2001; Antunes, 2008; Lima, 2008).

In 2002, a new right-wing Portuguese government abolished the referred Agency and substituted it with the General Directorate of Vocational Training. Soon after, adult education became scarcely mentioned in official documents; in its place appeared expressions such as "human-resources qualification," "vocational training" and

“lifelong qualifications”. According to Lima (2008), the vocational paradigm, vocational training, and the ideology of competences are presented as solutions to Portugal’s difficult situation as compared to other Northern and Central European countries; this ideology supports the idea that all problems can be solved through these dimensions of adult education. However, this also ignores the objective that calls for “the development of public policies and medium to long-term actions that aim to assure a humanistic, democratic education” (ibid., p. 96). The two existing forms of provision of public adult education remained, although new orientations were passed to RVCC centre teams. For instance, quantitative demands were made, such as imposing on centres that they have 1,000 annual inscriptions – 700 adults in process and 300 adults being certified. There was a clear shift towards the formalisation of processes, involving control, monitoring and assessment of the work achieved by CSOs.

In this period, a significant number of Portuguese CSOs were already conducting RVCC processes and delivering large numbers of EFA courses. This fact was consequently amplified because there appeared to be a change in EU policies. Former programmes that had been crucial in the past, such as LEADER, NOW or EQUAL, ceased, leaving groups without alternatives. In order for Portuguese CSOs to survive, programmes increasingly dependent on the EU would have to investigate other sources of funding. The situation in Portugal can be roughly described within the trend of more and more CSOs delivering services defined through state policy. This has an “influence greatly [on] what civil society organisations can or cannot do. Plus, in some cases concerning public offers of adult education, it is the state that defines the philosophic principles, methodologies, instruments, etc., thus carrying state policy into the concrete field of action” (Lucio-Villegas, Fragoso & Florindo, 2009, p. 174). During certain cycles of adult education evolution, Portuguese CSOs were a fundamental part of this sub-system and, quite significantly, the natural source of critical thought and practices because they focused on resistance and social emancipation. Given this, we may currently be witnessing a major shift in this scenario.

Even though the government changed again in 2005, when the socialist party won the election, existing trends were not altered. New policies were implemented with a renewed efficacy, supported by massive *media* campaigns, which worsened the state of affairs and provoked the emergence of new levels of state control over CSOs. Soon after, the government announced a new programme named the “New Opportunities Initiative” as well as the creation of an agency to guide the implementation of public policies in the sector, the National Agency for Qualifications (ANQ). Arguing that people’s qualifications are key to productivity and to improving the economy and labour market, the New Opportunities Initiative redesigned the existing RVCC provision, according to EU lifelong learning orientations. Departing from a network that included 84 centres at the end of 2005, the government rapidly opened up more than 450 new centres and aimed to have one million persons “qualified” by certification by the year 2010. Additionally, the great majority of these new centres were opened in regular secondary schools, which surely must have contributed to the diminishing of unemployment among teachers. This occurred simultaneously to changes in funding policy, which created difficulties for those civil society institutions that promoted centres. Overall, what was supposed to be adult education was given to the formal education system. These very recent events require some reflection:

1. In order to be able to work with adults using adult education principles, philosophy and methodologies, teachers need to cut ties with formal education paradigms, which is difficult to achieve and requires time. Additionally,

schools produce a certain organisational and cultural setting that makes it very hard to build a centre within a school that does not function according to the school's culture and rules (Fragoso, 2007). There is the real danger of transforming RVCC processes into formal school processes.

2. The pressures to certify in RVCC centres are real. This means there is the risk of transforming this system into a certifying factory that produces diplomas in an assembly line fashion.
3. Present public adult education in Portugal is a very narrow system that manages large masses of people. This system appears to be the core of adult education objectives and interests. At the same time, the state created a new area of employment for "new" adult educators and support for the remaining areas of adult education has vanished. Additionally, the EU seems to pay no attention to it. We have mentioned local development as an example of a critical practice guided by popular education; this will prove to be very difficult to continue, if not impossible. As a result, a certain local development we used to believe in is dead (Fragoso, 2009). The same reasoning is valid for many other areas of adult education (now absent) in Portugal, such as literacy courses, basic and general adult education initiatives, socio-cultural animation, civic education initiatives, and so forth.
4. The existence of more than 450 RVCC centres translates to around 7,000 technicians working in this area in Portugal. This means that we suddenly have an immense number of individuals who claim to be working in adult education. The questions raised by this simple matter are diverse: Are we witnessing the birth of a new (hidden) profession in Portugal? How do these individuals perceive their own work and professional identity (as teachers, educators, adult educators or technicians) (Guimarães, 2009a)? Do they see their work merely as an extension of schoolwork? Do they understand the most significant theoretical approaches of adult education (Finger & Asún, 2001)? Do they understand the history of this field of practice and the most evident issues in its social purpose (Martin, 2006)? What are the effects that this causes in the public's perception of the nature of adult education? In short, the present configuration of public adult education in Portugal raises a number of issues that concern us and seem to be important enough to be chosen as future research themes.

The eventual emergence of new professions within the field of lifelong learning will also involve the definition of a variety of technician profiles. Due to the characteristics of the processes of administration and management of the new forms of provision of adult education, most technicians occupy their time with technical procedures and general bureaucratic procedures. Therefore, they are far away from the educational interventions of organic intellectuals or other counter-hegemonic educators; in short, they are not committed to the building of critical reflection – they are lifelong learning technicians, specialists in managing an adult's autonomy in an apolitical form (Guimarães, 2009b).

Even though this situation represents a recent reality, there are already some investigations we can refer to that could help us deeply analyse the issues. In a case study designed to investigate adults' perceptions regarding RVCC processes, Narciso (2010) states that adults are well aware of the process focus in qualifications, employability and the acquisition of competences to better compete in the labour market. She clearly identifies present public adult education with lifelong learning

principles at the foundation of this perception, concluding that a society based on this type of education will never be able to implement an emancipatory culture. Because of this, she calls for the return to “a true adult education, reflective and with its humanistic roots, which never was capable to anchor in our country due to the constant changes and interests of educational policy” (ibid., p. 210).

Amorim (2009) conducted a case study with an aim to discover the impact of certification on several life dimensions of adults who had concluded the RVCC processes. Significant changes occurred in adults willing to continue their studies either in a formal or non-formal context, due to a re-valorisation of education. The second change occurred in a purely personal dimension and related to their self-confidence and self-esteem. However, Barros (2009a, 2009b) suggests that these processes carry a certain “psychologisation” that does not point to the heart of critical and emancipatory adult education. Her research concludes that there is a set of new institutions and educational processes that are imprinting a very deep re-configuration in the sector. This re-shaping, according to Barros (2009b, p. 702), is corroding the pedagogical pillars of what we used to call “adult education”. The paradigm of lifelong learning implicates the emergence of an “allomorphic and mutant adult education”, which, without significant opposition, is successfully holding back the development of adult educational experiences that aim at social transformation.

It is also important to comment on the issue of employability, a tenant that is central to lifelong learning. RVCC has been reshaped under the idea that it allows adults to obtain a better job or to improve their professional situation. However, Amorim (2009) registered only a few cases in which certified adults improved their professional situation. The number of successful transitions was not significant. Guimarães (2009a) also notes that this promise of a better job, new opportunities for social mobility and a better life should be compared to the real scenario. Structural unemployment emerges as an essential and intentional characteristic of our present macro-policies, and the *promise* might never be fulfilled and, under these conditions, actually becomes *deception*.

Conclusions or envisioning the future of adult education in Portugal

The hegemony of lifelong learning in the international agenda seemed to heavily transform the landscape of what used to be adult education. On one hand, this agenda gives a unique importance to the marginal sub-system of adult education, carrying new conceptions of education and training, learning methods and pedagogical work, theory and action assessment. On the other hand, it frames economic aims and transfers an instrumental character to adult education that is increasingly focused on lifelong qualifications, competitiveness and aiding people’s adaption to the labour market and economy.

In the Portuguese case, there was a first attempt at building an adult education sub-system according to the central principles and values of lifelong education. This was particularly clear in the revolutionary period, but also in immediately subsequent years. It is true that during the 1980s, educational policies changed due to the neoliberal shift, but this was done progressively – not as an abrupt change – handing adult education control over to national formal school management structures. The overall outcome was the formerly mentioned emergence of a particular form of mitigated neoliberalism (Afonso, 1998). Plus, at the end of the 1990s and inspired by the Hamburg CONFITEA, Portugal tried to build a public system of adult education that was supposed to keep some of the features of lifelong education.

After some hesitations, the New Opportunities Initiative constitutes, in our opinion without a doubt, the real appearance of lifelong learning philosophy into the concrete field of adult education practice in Portugal. From its inception on, social emancipation, critical action, humanistic, wide-open notions of citizenship or other principles dear to lifelong education have been forgotten. Clear discourses of strict economic growth, competences, qualifications and human resources, and narrow notions of training have been united with the main aim of providing more employable and better trained workers to the Portuguese economy.

Obviously, adult education in Portugal had its life outside the state. Moreover, historical analysis shows us the enormous potentialities of CSOs who, having the right context and opportunities, had always answered to diverse challenges with creativity. In short, CSOs were essential to the construction of the Portuguese democracy and to the development of autonomous and emancipatory educational principles. But currently, CSOs in the field of adult education are being co-opted. This co-optation seems to reverse the possibilities for re-contextualisation and re-interpretation of social emancipation of public policies. In most cases, it transforms CSOs into mere extensions of public services trapped within political agendas that transform social emancipation into training and human resources qualification.

We feel that the present trends are difficult to change in Portugal. Coherence between the major global trends, the political guidance delivered by the EU and the specific orientations of the successive national governments is such that local change will not affect an increasingly coordinated scenario. In this moment, all these key-parts of policy and their concrete implementation are heading in the same direction. In order to have some hope in our ability to transform this situation, we need at least one dissonant note in the tune. Under these conditions, to speak of social emancipation in Portugal today, is to go beyond policy. Examples of social emancipation practices could be found as the exception. While we wait for better days to come, we can at least look hard for good examples of resistance, critical thought and action, and give them a place they deserve. History never dies.

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