ADULT EDUCATION: A PATH TO SOCIAL INCLUSION. A CASE STUDY IN MOLISE (ITALY)

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Abstract

The society needs to rediscover education as a means for social inclusion. One of the most difficult challenges, at this respect, is to define the social inclusion of marginalized groups (the unemployed, the elderly, the low educated). Very seldom these people take an active part in society: having access to education can be a way to avoid marginalization.

This study will analyse the results of the European research project EDucation Against Marginalization (EDAM). Eight partners from as many European member States developed a database on life-long learning, which offers a perspective on whether and on how educational programs, aimed at improving the social inclusion of marginalized groups, can be optimized. In particular, the focus of this article is on the EDAM survey carried out in Molise, which involved 132 respondents out of a total of 995 at project level. The instruments of the survey were two questionnaires, addressed to social vulnerable people involved in educational programmes, and aimed at detecting to what extent attending such programmes is beneficial to their social inclusion. The questionnaires were explained and delivered in two different stages, 15 classes away from one another, by the respective teachers, specifically trained for the purpose. With respect to the social inclusion process, the analysis of the results in Molise showed an increase of 52.3% for participation and of 37.4 % for connection. Moreover, the results have pointed out that after participating in adult education programmes, the participants have experienced an increased capability of "history making" of society. In any case, although the results show to be fairly robust and the models fit is always adequate, using all the data as a single sample requires that we interpret the data with caution.

Key words: *active citizenship, adult education, participation, social inclusion, quality of life.*

Introduction

In the first industrial society, an important social paradigm bears with it the idea of social integration. The interest on this topic is particularly connected to the idea of solving conflicts in society. Émile Durkheim was the pioneer of this approach, linked to the concepts of cooperation, collaboration and mutual respect for a positive contribution to society. Moreover, Durkheim (1998) recognized that in Modern Society the most important social bond is the moral foundation and only school, thanks to its educational (training) function, is able to transmit those capabilities aimed at fulfilling social integration (co-operation).

Today, just like it was in the past, it is very important to capitalize on education to ensure l conflicts' solving. Education for all is a key condition to fight poverty and social exclusion. This condition should be able to integrate all the citizens and therefore should be able to promote solidarity among different people. Education for all is the ground for a knowledge society which should include each and every individual, because knowledge - as an output of scientific research - is a public good, available to all. Knowledge society, in this way, is the forerunner of good life quality (Andrews, & Withey, 1974) and human, social and democratic development.

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EDucation against Marginalization (EDAM) is based on the idea that education allows the personal fulfilment of people who live in knowledge society, by promoting all forms of knowledge and in particular education for vulnerable groups. In fact, EDAM research examines whether and how adult education has an effect on the social inclusion (Atkinson, Marlier, & Nolan, 2004) of the marginalized groups surveyed in the eight European member states participating to the project. In particular, the focus of this article is on the results observed in Molise (Italy).

Research Problem

Edam research investigated the social inclusion of vulnerable groups. Edam survey argued that vulnerable groups "(*e.g.* unemployed, elderly and low educated) experience problems in participating and being active in society. Nevertheless, in the knowledge society, education can provide an active involvement finalized to overcome the barriers to social inclusion; moreover, education answers to the learning needs of civil society. Education for social inclusion can be approached at the level of the learners and their backgrounds, the learning environment and the schooling process, and at the level of the structures and policies of the educational system. At this respect, EDAM wants to provide policy-makers with ideas and reference material to illustrate how social inclusion can be enhanced through education, with the final goal of offering a perspective on whether and on how educational programs having this purpose can be optimized" (Edam Report, 2011).

Research Focus

The right to education, recognized by 1948 Universal Declaration of Human rights, is preliminary to the exercise of the other rights (Grignoli, Mancini & Saporiti, 2003). A good policy against poverty and social exclusion should have its pillar in structural policies aimed at increasing the education level. In particular, according to a dominant point of view, education is an important dimension of social inclusion, because investing in human capital not only has a positive effect on economy (in terms of labour market and income) and on society as well (higher levels of education make participation in social and cultural life easier) (Grusec & Hastings, 2007). In contemporary society, the continuing prevalence of educational inequality is a major infringement of the rights of each human being and it is also an important impediment to social and economic development.

In particular, Italian public spending on education is equal to 4.4% of the GDP, which is the signal of an attitude of indifference towards education. Consequently, the phenomenon of school dropouts is widespread. In 2006, the early school leavers rate was equal to 20.6% of the young population. This behaviour is also evident in the data that measure the level of education of the working people (aged 15–64 years old). The level of education decreases markedly with the increase in age: in 2009, the rate of people without a high school diploma was equal to 25.0% and in Molise, particularly, it reached 29.5%.

Furthermore, the educational inequality is deep-rooted in Molise where the poverty is more concentrated. In this area, poverty and social exclusion are worsened by geographic isolation and are deeply connected to the level of social weakness/vulnerability of people (Grignoli & Mancini, 2011).

In particular, Italian poverty explodes in Molise (24.4%), where it is necessary to eliminate the material conditions that contribute to marginalization of people and where there is need to increase the human and social capital to reach welfare.

The lack of human and social capital is an important factor to explain the poverty of an area; according to Amartya Sen's approach, the absence of this capital does not allow people to develop their skills, thus transforming them into vulnerable subjects (Sen, 1999; Castell, 1996).

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Methodology of the Research

General Background of the Research

EDAM project, at European and National level, aims to provide an integrated methodology to enhance (and ensure facilitation of) social inclusion by means of adult education (Jarvis & Griffin, 2003).

Therefore, the project combines desk research, empirical research, tool development and professional developmental activities for different stakeholders on different levels. The desk research results in a description of the *status quo* of adult education on the European policy level as well as in the different participating countries.

In addition, it describes the development of an instrument to measure the effectiveness of adult education for the enhancement of social inclusion (De Greef, Segers & Verté, 2012).

The empirical research, whose results are hereby examined, implied a pilot study supported by the aforementioned instruments aimed at surveying the effects of adult education programmes on social inclusion. The research tools have been designed according to four dimensions of social inclusion: activation, internalization, connection and participation, together with other specific features of the educational process (e.g. individual characteristics and learning environments). As discussed by De Greef, M., Segers, M. Verté D. (2010) "The dimension of activation can be defined an increase of social inclusion in terms of activation, which refers to the functional outcome for the individual, meant as the ability to cope with practical daily problems. The dimension of internalization is the increase of emotional satisfaction for the individual, seen as the increase of feelings of happiness and safety. Increasing participation refers to a growing functionality of an individual in connection with his or her environment. In this respect, increase of social inclusion can be seen as being more involved in the neighborhood. Emotional satisfaction of vulnerable adults in relation to their environment can be explained as having more or better contact with others. This is regarded as the increase of connection."

One of the most difficult steps of the empirical research has been persuading the regional institutions of adult education to join this research and commit to distribute questionnaires to their participants twice. In particular, the research group of Molise has worked with the regional institutions for adult education (Permanent Territorial Centres/Centri territoriali permanenti – CTP) as participants in the survey.

The teachers of the Centers were briefed so to explain the research and give questionnaires to the respondents in two different stages, 15 classes apart from one another (Pre-test and post-test).

Table 1. The flow chart of EDAM project in Molise.

Where	Permanent Territorial Centres (CTP) in Isernia & Termoli
Period	April –June 2010
Programmes	1) Digital skills 2) Language Courses (The language of the country where the course is issued) 3) Basic Skills
Sample	n. 132 respondents
Teacher	Teachers of CTP
Staff	Human Resources of CTP

Source: Edam project

Practically, the teacher introduced the research and read aloud the front-page. Afterwards, the questionnaire was explained in every part: in order to enhance standardisation, the consortium of EDAM provided a teacher's instruction manual. Questionnaires were filled in during class time or at home.

Besides the development of the aforementioned instrument, other outcomes involve the development of an on-line evaluation tool for the managers of adult education programs to monitor their effectiveness in terms of social inclusion; the development of a toolkit for policy makers to support them with arguments and examples of good practice to put adult education for social inclusion on the policy agenda. Activities of professional development were also carried out, in the form of a teacher training program that was organized in Denmark (partner country), where teachers from all participating countries have shared and created knowledge, skills and tools to improve their daily practice. This has resulted in a Training Manual for teachers of adult education programs aimed at increasing social inclusion.

Last but not least, a crucial element of the integrated methodology is the dissemination and exploitation of the results of EDAM, where a broad range of communication tools and channels have been used: personal communications, a videoclip (available on YouTube), the project's website, conferences, seminars, exploitation events, press releases, newsletters and articles in journals.

Sample of Research

In Molise the survey involved 132 respondents (995 at European Edam partnership level), mostly housewives, unemployed, inmates, immigrants.

With respect to gender, the 70% of the respondents are female. The median age is 36 years; the maximum age is 69 years. More than 44% of the respondents are younger than 40 years. The 11% of the interviewed didn't answer. Senior participants (>60y) are the 33% of the sample; there is a more balanced mix of nationalities in the respondents' group and there is a quite equal distribution of married and unmarried respondents. Most of respondents have no children (40%).

The majority of the respondents (38.6%) have attended formal education programs for 11 to 15 years; the second largest group (21.2%) has attended formal education programs for 16 to 20 years; the 19.7% of interviewed have attended the school for 6 to 10 years. The 12.1% of the respondents did not answer.

Table 2. Sample characteristics: percentages of participants per some background variable.

Gender		Age			Nationality	
Male	Female	21 – 40	41 – 60	61 – 80	Autochthon	Foreign
21	70	44.70	32.58	0.76	45.45	44.70

Marital status			Number of children						Total years of education		
Married	Un-married	Living Together	0	1	2	3	4	More than 4	< 5	11 – 15	16 – 20
42,42	39,39	6,6	40.91	12.88	24.24	3.79	3.03	0.00	3.79	38.64	21.21

Percentages may not sum to 100 because of missing response.

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Instrument and Procedures

The instruments, two questionnaires, aimed at measuring to what extent vulnerable adults show an increase in social inclusion after participating in adult education programmes. The instrument consists of the following scales: self-directed learning, training design, life circumstances, activation and internalisation and participation and connection. The following table presents the scales and their subscales, number of items and reliability coefficients. The reliability coefficients, the Cronbach alpha coefficient, is calculated based on the European sample of the EDAM research and it indicates an acceptable reliability of the different subscales.

Table 3. Scales, number of items per scale and reliability coefficients.

Scales	Subscales	N of items	Cronbach's Alpha
1. Self-directed learning	Self-directed learning	14	0.914
2. Transfer-design	Teacher support	8	0.937
	Learning contents- and activities	4	0.906
	Direct surroundings	9	0.586
	Transfer possibilities	3	0.837
3. Life-circumstances	Personal life-circumstances	12	0.864
	Barriers	4	0.701
	Upbringing and work	3	0.667
	Care	3	0.594
4. Activation & Internalisation	National language skills	9	0.928
	Digital skills	3	0.950
	International language skills	3	0.862
	Assertiveness	5	0.895
	Labour- and upbringing skills	4	0.840
	Voluntary-work and neighbourhood skills	3	0.764
	Contact skills	7	0.821
5. Participation & Connection	Meeting and attempting	4	0.846
	Meeting intimate contacts	4	0.824
	Attempting associations in neighbourhood	7	0.862
	Being active in nature and sports	4	0.739
	Involving into arts and culture	2	0.793
	Getting a membership	4	0.619
	Preventing loneliness	11	0.840

Source: Edam project

Data Analysis

As discussed by Edam project at Europe level (2009-2011), "The research measured increase in social inclusion as an improvement of: (1) national languages skills, (2) digital skills, (3) international language skills, (4) assertiveness, (5) labour and upbringing skills, (6) voluntary work and neighbourhood skills, (7) contact skills, (8) financial skills, (9) meeting and attempting, (10) meeting intimate contacts, (11) attempting in associations in neighbourhood, (12) being active in nature and sports, (13) involvement in arts and culture, (14) getting a membership, and (15) preventing loneliness. Variables 1 to 7 refer to the 'Activation and Internalization' and variables 8 to 17 refer to the 'Participation and Connection' (Edam project).

Table 4. Overview of the used scales in the questionnaires.

Question-naires	Scales	N of items		Example of items per scale
1. Self-directed learning	Self-directed learning	14		Taking initiative to learn
2. Transfer-design Transfer possibilities	Teacher support	8		Appre-ciation of learner
	Learning contents-and activities	4		Practical demonstra-tions of problem solving
	Direct surround-ings	9		Support of surround-ings
		3	Increase of confidence	
3. Life-circum-stances	Personal life-cir-cumstances	12	Happiness	
	Barriers	4	Feeling too old to learn	
	Upbringing and work	3	Raising own children	
	Care	3	Taking care of disabled per-sons	

4. Activation & Internalisation	National language skills	9	Being able to read
	Digital skills	3	Being able to use the computer
	International language skills	3	Speaking different languages
	Assertiveness	5	Being able to solve problems
	Labour- and up-bringing skills	4	Being able to solve problems
	Voluntary-work and neighbourhood skills	3	Working as a volunteer
	Contact skills	7	Respecting others
5. Participation & Connection	Meeting and attempting	4	Meeting people
	Meeting intimate contacts	4	Visiting family
	Attempting associations in neighbourhood	7	Organising activities in neighbourhood
	Being active in nature and sports	4	Enjoying sport activities
	Involving into arts and culture	2	Enjoying the arts
	Getting a membership	4	Member of a sports club
	Preventing loneliness	11	Example feeling empty

Source: Edam project

Results of the Research

In the case of Molise, the results of the survey indicate that, after participating in adult education, 52.3 % of the participants experienced increased social inclusion on the subscale 'Activation and Internalization' and 37.9 % of the participants experienced increased social inclusion on the subscale 'Participation and Connection'.

With respect to the dimensions of social inclusion, the data-analysis in Molise shows an increase of 52.3 % for activation and internalization and an increase of 37.9 % for participation and connection.

More specifically, the 30% of the respondents shows an increase in the following social inclusion variables: national and international language skills, digital skills, assertiveness, and, contact skills, attempting in associations neighbourhood. This means that 52.3 % of the participants experience a better mastery of basic life competences ('Activation') and experience more feelings of happiness, safety and control ('Internalization') when they experience a supportive teacher and when they experience that during the program they have the opportunity to practice what they have learned to apply in daily life. Besides this 37.9 % of the participants participate more in the community ('Participation') and experience more social interactions ('Connection').

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Moreover, a few demographic variables are related to an increase in activation and internalisation, more precisely having a partner, having no prior qualification and experiencing positive life circumstances. However, for participants having three children, there is a significant probability of experiencing a decrease in activation and internalization.

An increase in connection (experiencing social interactions) and participation (participating in the community) is significantly influenced by (1) the experience of participants that in the courses authentic examples were used, participants were encouraged to look at the examples from different perspectives and that discussion among participants was encouraged and (2) by the experience that they are supported in the program to practice what they learn in daily life. Moreover, participants showing a higher level of self-directed learning show more increase in social inclusion in terms of connection and participation.

In any case, the nature of the Edam project, at Europe level and Molise level too, is exploratory. For this reason, the interpretations need to be made with caution.

Discussion

Taking the aforementioned elements into account, the results of the survey indicate that after participating in adult education, 44.2% of the participants experienced increased social inclusion on the subscale "Activation & Internalization" and 37.4% of the participants experienced increased social inclusion on the subscale "Participation & Connection" (see Table 1). This means that 44.2% of the participants experience a better mastery of basic life competences ("Activation") and experience more feelings of happiness, safety and control ("Internalization"). Besides, this 37.4 % of the participants participate more in the community ("Participation") and experience more social interactions ("Connection"). This result is much more encouraging than the earlier published 10% to 20% revenue of training (Taris, 2007) and it is consolidated by different research experiences on the economic benefits of education.

A recent study of Bertelsmann Foundation in Germany determined the cost of insufficient education to be one billion euro (after 20 years, compared to a situation when 50% of vulnerable person received more education) These costs consisted of higher transfer incomes for unemployed, more costs for health provisions less income taxes and others (http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/bst/de/media/xcms_bst_dms_33657_33658_2.pdf).

What matters most as influential on the increase of social inclusion (besides some socio-demographic and country effects) is transfer possibilities (possibilities to use the learned competences in daily life) on both scales, the teacher support on "Activation & Internalisation" and the learning contents and activities on "Participation & Connection".

Conclusions

Adult education is the path for weaker people to access that set of knowledge thanks to which they will be equipped to cope with the challenges set by the society nowadays. In this way, adult education is the key to decrease poverty and social exclusion and to increase the life quality of those who participate to such programmes. In particular, "Life Long Learning is an essential element of the European Higher Education Area. In the future Europe, built upon a knowledge-based society and economy, lifelong learning strategies are necessary to face challenges of competiveness and the use of new technologies and to improve social cohesion equal opportunities and the quality of life" (Communique of Prague May 19th 2001)

These are the premises that give force to the development of the EU-promoted education and training programmes, like it was Grundtvig, now absorbed within the broader scope of Erasmus Plus; Grundtvig, within whose frame EDAM was funded, is targeted to adult groups who are traditionally cut out from formal educational paths.

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At this respect, the survey conducted by the EDAM consortium has clearly fulfilled its aims in concluding that "adult education is successful in enhancing social inclusion, at least, when:

1) adult education is able to offer opportunities and support to the participants to use what they have learned during the program in their daily life;

2) adult education is able to organize education that takes the daily life experiences of the participants as the starting point of learning, stimulates discussion and triggers to look at the learning contents from multiple perspectives" (Edam Report, 2011).

In particular in Edam project, the learning experience increases social inclusion and life quality of the participants because of they became more active after the project (they participated in outdoor activities, developed social responsibility or act in social networks). The participants connected more to other people or organizations and finally they felt better and ease after the project.

In conclusion, education needs to preserve a life-long dimension to fight poverty and social exclusion of marginalized people and to increase their life quality. Nonetheless, the concept of a "new educational welfare" still needs to be transformed into practice; at this respect, social research should be the theoretical guide for policy makers to build a knowledge society able to enhance human, social and democratic development.

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