

# BAEA

## Becoming Adult Educators in the European Area

# Synthesis research report

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## Foreword

4 | This publication presents the outcomes of research activities carried out in Denmark, Estonia, Italy and Sweden in 2008-2009 within the collaborative project: Becoming Adult Educators in the European Area (BAEA). The project has been funded with support from the European Commission under the European Union's Lifelong Learning Programme (Grant No. 142405-LLP-1-2008-1-DK-GRUNDTVIG-GMP). It reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

The cross-national project team was composed of researchers from several institutions (in alphabetical order):

- Brunnsvik Folk High School (Sweden): Per-Ola Jansson & Christina Gabergs-Gunn;
- Danish School of Education, Aarhus University (Denmark): Marcella Milana & Anne Larson;
- Estonian Non-Formal Adult Education Association (Estonia): Tiina Jääger & Maire Sander;
- Linköping University (Sweden): Per Andersson & Susanne Köpsén;
- Metropolitan University College (Denmark): Lise Søgaard Lund;
- People's University of Rome (Italy): Andrea Ciantar, Stefano De Camillis, Fiorella Farinelli & Monica Griscioli;
- Tallinn University (Estonia): Marin Gross & Larissa Jõgi.

Further, four national user-groups consisting of policymakers and practitioners in the field of initial education and training for adult educators-to-be in the participating countries were formed at the outset of the project and met twice for a dialogue with BAEA's researchers and provided feedback on project activities.

Special thanks goes to members of the BAEA team who do not appear as authors in this report as well as members of the national user-groups for their inestimable contribution to the collection of empirical evidence and insightful discussions on the research's activities and results.

Other products resulting from the project, including single-country reports, a Delphi study and a handbook for adult educators, are or will be available for download through the project website ([www.dpu.dk/baea](http://www.dpu.dk/baea)) by September 2010.

The project coordinator and editor  
Marcella Milana

# Executive summary

By Anne Larson

With an increased interest in and focus on lifelong learning and adult education as a means to economic development, social cohesion and participation in a democracy, comes an enhanced attention on adult educators and their qualifications. In light of this, the aim of *Becoming Adult Educators in the European Area (BAEA)*, results of which are presented in this publication, has been to investigate ways prospective adult educators qualify for their jobs in terms of professional competences before entering the profession. Inspired by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986), among others, the study is grounded on the premise that individuals exist in multiple, multi-layered and interacting contexts, each of which is a domain of social relations and physical contexts. The specific aims of the project have been:

- To analyse ways in which adult education policies and initial education and training opportunities for prospective adult educators affect professionalisation processes in the field of general, vocationally-oriented and liberal adult education;
- To investigate social and cultural factors that influence the individual formation of initial competences and qualifications of adult educators in the field of general, vocationally-oriented and liberal adult education;
- To investigate the main factors that influence the construction of a professional identity among prospective adult educators.

Professional development in this study is defined as a process that involves the acquisition of a specialised body of knowledge, the formation of personal teaching-learning theories grounded on both theoretical principles and the self-interpretation of one's own practice, as well as the construction of a professional identity.

The study is designed as a comparative study involving four European countries: Denmark, Estonia, Italy and Sweden. The empirical data was collected in the period of 2008-2009, in two steps. In the first step, a literature review of existing information on adult education and learning and on the structural conditions surrounding the adult educator at work was conducted. The documents analysed included research reports and articles, official descriptions of national education systems, policy papers, laws, by-laws and reports, including national reports to the European Commission on the implementation of lifelong learning strategies at national levels. The second step consisted of narrative interviews which were conducted with a total of sixty-two persons undertaking specialised studies in adult education and learning. Each interview was first analysed in depth following a

common frame of reference. Thereafter, cross-case analyses were carried-out nationally, and finally comparisons were made cross-nationally.

6 | Though the four countries studied differ in relation to adult education traditions as well as structural and political conditions, the analysis unveils similar trends for all – both in relation to adult education and training and in relation to the qualification of current and prospective adults educators. The empirical evidence brought together underscores that while the quality of adult education represents a topic of concern, it nonetheless underestimates the difficulties embedded in the provision of qualified teaching-learning transactions by adult educators who often enter the profession without specialised pedagogical knowledge. Further, the evidence highlights that professionalism in the field of adult education embodies contrasting views and understandings of its purpose, characterisations and possibilities, not least due to weak social recognition, fragile collective representativeness and individual protection.

To better the conditions for the professionalisation of prospective and current adult educators, hence the quality of adult education provisions, more research-based knowledge in the field is needed. At the same time, the European Commission, governments, and other institutional actors and education agencies should:

- Develop policies and practices aimed at defining and implementing initial education and training paths and appropriate support for further career development in the field of adult education;
- Recognise adult educators as a professional group with complex cultural and professional competences;
- Create new opportunities for participation in specialised studies and concrete or virtual communities for professional exchange and mutual enrichment;
- Organise functional internships;
- Improve recruitment strategies and working conditions.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

By Marcella Milana

## 1.1. Background

In modern societies there is a pervasive consideration that lifelong learning is necessary in order to guarantee further economic and social development, to reinforce democratic participation and to strengthen social cohesion. Consequently, national and international strategies for lifelong learning have embraced not only reforms of compulsory or basic education, but also structural intervention in the field of adult education and training. This has brought along new demands for adult educators as a professional group (EC, 2006, 2007a, 2007b; Merriam & Brockett, 2007; Nuissl & Lattke, 2008; Osborne, 2009).

The debate on the professionalisation of adult educators has been revitalised in recent times by its re-positioning on the policy agenda of transnational bodies. The European Union acted as a driver by inviting national governments to invest in “*initial and continuing professional development measures*” (EC, 2006, p. 7), by addressing “*the quality of teachers and teacher education as a key factor in securing the quality of education*” (EC, 2007b, p. 15), and by recognising that “*little attention has been paid to the training (initial and continuing)... of adult learning staff*” (EC, 2007a, p. 8). Further, the European Union has invested economic resources to commission a study of current conditions of adult learning professionals in Europe (Research voor Beleid & PLATO, 2008) and a follow-up study of key competences for adult learning professionals (Buischool, Broek, van Lakerveld, Zarifis & Osborne, 2010).

Contributions to current debates of professionalisation in adult education also result from the efforts of researchers and practitioners that have been directed, on the one hand, at identifying, describing, comprehending and understanding new demands on adult educators in diverse societal contexts (Egetenmeyer & Nuissl exp. 2010; Merriam & Brockett, 2007; Osborne, 2009; Przybylska, 2008) and, on the other hand, at planning training modules for the professional upgrading of adult educators (cf. Carlsen & Irons 2003; Jääger & Irons, 2006).

Against this background, however, only limited attention has focussed on researching, specifically, initial education and training of prospective adult educators, as compared to other professionals in education. Further, while a number of national policies emphasise the quality of adult education and training provisions, initial education and pre-service training of prospective adult educators are rarely concentrated on.

The project *Becoming Adult Educators in the European Area (BAEA)* was conceived with the scope of investigating ways in which prospective adult educa-

tors acquire professional competences and qualifications before entering the profession in four European countries: Denmark, Estonia, Italy and Sweden.

The specific aims of the project were:

- To analyse ways in which adult education policies and initial education and training opportunities for prospective adult educators affect professionalisation processes in the field of general, vocationally-oriented and liberal education;
- To investigate social and cultural factors that influence the individual formation of initial competences and qualifications in the field of general, vocationally-oriented and liberal education;
- To investigate the main factors that influence the construction of a professional identity among prospective adult educators.

Given the extensiveness of the field, the BAEA team had to make some choices in order to delimit the area under investigation. Firstly, although the term ‘adult educators’ includes all people involved in the design, management and implementation of adult education opportunities, the BAEA project paid special attention to teachers and trainers in short, medium and long courses and programmes – those working in direct contact with adult learners. Secondly, although people practising adult education on a voluntary basis make an important contribution to this field of practice, the project only addressed people who earn a living educating adults – irrespective of the fact that they may or may not be recognised as adult educators. Within this group, the main focus centred on people teaching in the adult education and training supply that is regulated by the state and regional governments. Thirdly, although the project’s original interest was on ‘prospective’ adult educators, i.e. people preparing themselves to enter the field of adult education as professionals, the researchers had to acknowledge that a clear-cut distinction among those willing to enter the profession and those already working as adult educators was not always possible. In spite of the above limitations, the project captured the complexity of the field by addressing different adult education contexts, i.e. general adult education, vocationally-oriented education and liberal education, rather than limiting its attention to one of these areas.

The remaining sections elucidate the theoretical and methodological frame that guided the project and inform about the gathering of empirical data. The chapter concludes with a brief outline of the report’s structure and content.

## **1.2. Project theoretical framework**

A review of the scholarly literature on professionalism and professionalisation exemplifies how these two terms have been assigned different meanings, when ap-

plied in a variety of vocational areas, in different socio-cultural contexts (cf. Barber, 1963; Cervero, 1992; Collins, 1990; Elliott, 2004; Etzioni, 1969; Greenwood, 1966; Tawney, 1920; West, 2003; Whitehead, 1933; Wilensky, 1964).

Within the realm of adult education, several studies shed light on the influence of societal, educational and occupational contexts within which professional development among adult educators occurs; hence, they draw attention to the existence of a multitude of educational paths leading to professionalisation among adult educators (Andersson & Köpsén, 2009; Buiskool, Lakerveld & Broek, 2009; Jögi & Gross, 2009a; Milana & Larson, 2009; Przybylska, 2008; Research voor Beleid & PLATO, 2008; Sabatini, Melanie, Ginsburg, Limeul & Russel, 2000).

Against this background, however, professionalism and the professionalisation of adult educators are still under debate and have not been investigated to such a degree of breadth and depth, as is the case in other educational fields, e.g. compulsory education. Consequently, the current debate on professional development in this field seems to reflect competing discourses on adult education and learning. The term ‘discourse’ is here used to refer to “*all the practices and meanings shaping a particular community of social actors*” (Howarth, 2000, p. 5). This definition is rooted in the broader social constructivist perspective and therefore shares its premises: the refusal of a taken-for-granted knowledge about the world; the recognition of historical and cultural specificity of world representations and of identity-construction processes as inseparable from social interactions (Burr, 1995).

In spite of divergent views and approaches that characterise today’s studies on professionalism (cf. Cunningham, 2008), and competing discourses on adult education and learning, core unifying principles seem to be found in a general recognition that:

- Professionalism represents the precondition for a competent, specialised practise that takes place in a work context;
- Professionalisation is the process leading to professionalism.

Accordingly, professional development is understood as a complex, slow process, a non-linear continuum and a continuous process of systematic maintenance and improvements made to broaden the professional growth and development of personal qualities, necessary for the execution of professional roles that take place in society (Berliner, 2001; McAuliffe, 2006). In other words, it is a lifelong and life wide learning process that involves planning, managing and benefiting of one’s personal and professional development and it is influenced by an individual’s self-awareness (Winter, 1995). Eraut (2004) uses the term ‘self-knowledge’ to address the capacity that an agent possesses to use knowledge in order to understand and construct the self within a work context.

In line with this argument, within the BAEA project, we define professional development of adult educators as a process that involves:

- The acquisition of a specialised body of knowledge;
- The formation of personal teaching-learning theories grounded on both theoretical principles and the self-interpretation of one's own practise;
- The construction of a professional identity.

### 1.3. Methodological consideration and data collection

The premise of the methodological approach applied by the BAEA team is that individuals exist in multiple, multi-layered and interacting contexts, each of which is a domain of social relations and physical context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986). Here, the individual creation of meaning is related to life conditions and social identities. An important element in this perspective is the focus on the interaction between adult educators and the structural conditions that characterise the wider socio-cultural context in which they act.

From the autumn of 2008 to the spring of 2009, the BAEA team collected existing information on specialised studies in adult education and learning and examined the structural conditions characterising the countries under investigation through document analysis on three types of key documents: 1) research reports/articles; 2) official papers describing national education systems; and 3) policy papers such as policy statements, laws, by-laws, and reports, including national reports to the European Commission on the implementation of lifelong learning strategies at national levels.

The desk research activity aimed: a) to map out current initial education and training pathways for prospective adult educators as well as different understandings of professionalisation processes, which govern general, vocationally-oriented and liberal education strategies; and b) to identify specific policy strategies put forward to enhance quality in the field of adult education.

The **Danish sample** consisted of fifteen people aged 31-57 (two men and thirteen women), who were undertaking one of the following studies: (i) a basic education course in adult education, lasting a few weeks, which leads to a course certificate (four); (ii) a course entitled 'Teachers of Adults', lasting one-three years, which leads to a final degree (four); (iii) a diploma programme in adult learning, of a duration of one-two years, which leads to a final degree (four); and (iv) a master programme in adult education of one-two years' duration, which awards a final degree (three).

The **Estonian sample** consisted of fifteen participants aged 25-47 (three men and twelve women). They represent different fields of work: formal adult education (three), vocational adult education (six), non-formal adult education (four), and other types of business (two). At the time of the interviews, all interviewees were undertaking specialised studies at either MA (seven) or BA (eight) levels.

The **Swedish sample** included fifteen interviewees aged 29-61 (two men and thirteen women); however, one interview was not included in the analysis due to ethical reasons. The interviewees were undertaking or had recently undertaken teacher education at the university level – a teacher education programme for general or vocational education at upper secondary level, with an adult education profile, or a folk high school teacher programme, or shorter university courses preparing teachers to become adult educators – or a liberal adult educator course at a folk high school. Five interviewees were in general education, five were in vocational education, and five were in liberal adult education (whereof the interviewee omitted from the analysis was).

Individual motivations for working in the field of adult education and the learning processes that led to the formation of competences, qualifications and professional identities in this field could be better understood by applying a biographical perspective (Bertaux, 1997; Bertaux & Thompson, 1997; Fischer-Rosenthal, 2000). Within this perspective, Horsdal (2002) argues that narrative interviews provide important insights in the learning experiences of people, and constitute the basis for analysing the significance of specific learning arenas for individuals to develop viewpoints, which guide their intentions and actions and shape their identities. People's narratives convey information about both individuals' participation in different learning contexts and the impact of such experiences on their life course. Accordingly, identity is understood by Horsdal as a narrative construction – a narrative about who one is, in relation to the life one has lived and the life one wants to live in the future. In line with this, processes of identity-construction represent retrospective creations of coherence and meaning in the temporarily separated parts of the lived experience.

The researchers involved in the BAEA project position themselves within this perspective; hence, from the spring to the summer of 2009, the team collected a total of sixty-two narrative interviews with people undertaking specialised studies in adult education and learning in the four countries covered by the project. The main characteristics of the national samples are presented in separate boxes. For the selection of interviewees, the BAEA team applied a mix-sampling strategy: first, relevant educational providers of specialised studies in adult education and learning were identified in each of the countries under investigation in order to gain access to their students; then these students were invited to participate in narrative interviews on a voluntary basis. Although this sampling strategy did not control gender, age, field

of work and terms of employment, the researchers believe that the resulting sample still depicts major distributional trends among the population under investigation.

Each narrative interview was collected in just one session where an interviewee was invited to tell his/her own life story and, after a break, the participant was asked the following pre-defined questions:

- Can you tell about the path that you have taken in order to work in the field of adult learning (this question was only posed by the researcher in cases where the theme had not spontaneously been covered by the interviewee, in the first part of a narration)?
- Can you tell about what made you choose this course?
- How would you describe a person working in the field of adult learning?
- Do you see any difference between teaching children and teaching adults?
- How do you see yourself in a vocational context?
- What are your visions for the future?

The **Italian sample** consisted of seventeen persons aged 25-60 (fifteen women and two men). Eleven were undertaking specialised studies at the MA level, mainly in the faculties of psychology and pedagogy. They generally has little work experience which was not always related to their field of study. The remaining six were workers and volunteers in the field of adult education.

In each country, the researchers made an in-depth analysis of individual interviews, applying a common frame of reference inspired by Horsdal (2002); then they performed a cross-case analysis aimed at identifying similarities and variations on common themes within each national sample.

Findings from the research activities carried-out at national levels were presented and discussed in partner meetings, held along the project's lifecycle, where the BAEA team also engaged in joint analyses and cross-national comparisons. Country-specific findings are presented in depth in single-country reports available for download at: [www.dpu.dk/baea](http://www.dpu.dk/baea).

#### 1.4. Structure of the report

The present report provides a synthesis of national findings and engages in a comparative analysis of the four countries under investigation. The project findings are illustrated in chapters 2-6. Albeit that all authors were invited to: (i) provide a content-specific description and describe methodological challenges faced at the national level when applying the common methodological criteria, if relevant; (ii) present a significant synthesis of country-specific findings; and (iii) discuss the main issues emerging from a cross-national interpretation, not all chapters trail an

equivalent structure, as they reflect the authors' style and traditions in performing comparative analysis.

That being said, chapter 2 presents the status and provision of adult education and training that is regulated by the state and regional governments – if any. In doing so, the chapter also addresses the socio-economic status of adult educators by examining current employment regulations and terms of employment for teachers of adults as well as the role played by labour unions and other professional organisations representing the interests of adult educators. Chapter 3 presents existing opportunity structures that (prospective) adult educators have in order to acquire the body of knowledge, skills, competences and qualifications that are considered necessary for working with adults in a variety of educational settings. Further, it provides an overview of national policy strategies for adult education and learning. These include both governmental policy on education and training for adult educators and specific strategies put forward by professional organisations that aim at ensuring the professional development of adult educators. Chapter 4 analyses how people working or willing to work as adult educators construct their individual paths to adult education and specialised studies in the field. Chapter 5 illustrates which understandings (prospective) adult educators have of their professional role, how they construct the self within current professional contexts and how they foresee their future careers. Chapter 6 describes their views on adult educators by addressing what characterises the teaching-learning transactions that occur in adult education contexts and the differences they describe in teaching adults versus youngsters/children, if any.

Finally, chapter 7 briefly reports on the main results that led to the formulation of policy recommendations, which conclude this report.

# Chapter 2: Adult education as a professional field of practice

This chapter depicts the main features that characterise adult education as a field of professional practice in the four countries covered by the project. In particular, section 2.1 provides a short introduction to the status and provision of education and training opportunities for the adult population in Denmark, Estonia, Italy and Sweden. In doing so, the section limits its presentation to education and training provisions regulated or financed by the state and, in the case of Italy, by regional governments. Section 2.2 addresses the socio-economic status of adult educators, by examining current employment regulations and terms of employment for teachers of adults at national levels, and describes the role played by the labour unions and other professional organisations, whenever relevant. Finally the chapter concludes with a discussion of similarities and differences identified at the cross-national level.

## 2.1. The status and provision of adult education

### Denmark

According to data from Eurostat (2009), almost one third (30.2 %) of the Danish labour force, aged 25-64 years, had participated in some kind of adult education and training activity within the last four weeks prior to the study. The high participation rate among Danes, which is three times the European average, is partly explained by the existence of a well developed adult education system, comprising three typologies of provision (Milana & Larson; 2010):

- (1) General adult education, which aims at increasing the chances adults have of enrolling in further education as well as fostering adults' general interest in learning activities. General education is offered at levels corresponding to grades 8 through 10 in lower secondary school as well as upper secondary school. The main providers are adult education centres.
- (2) Vocationally-oriented adult education, which consists of labour market training, and vocational education and training for adults. Vocationally-oriented adult education is made up of basic adult education and further adult education as well as diploma and master education. This typology of provision is generally offered by labour market training centres and universities.

- (3) Liberal adult education, which aims at increasing general and specific knowledge and skills in order to support adults in taking responsibility for their own lives, and their active participation in society, including the labour market. Liberal adult education is offered by adult education associations, day high schools, folk high schools, and university extensions.

## **Estonia**

The Estonian Adult Education Act, promulgated by the Estonian Parliament in 1993, establishes three typologies of educational provision aimed at the adult population (Jõgi & Gross, 2010):

- (1) Formal education includes basic education, general upper secondary education and higher education in the form of evening courses and distance learning provided by universities, open universities, and adult gymnasiums.
- (2) Professional education covers in-service training primarily offered by training centres, continuing education departments in universities and vocational schools, non-formal training centres and folk high schools. An increased volume of in-service training is being offered by professional unions.
- (3) Non-formal adult education delivered by public universities and training centres, but also by different societies and groups, which make ample use of learning circles, i.e. libraries, clubs, learning circles.

## **Italy**

The right for adult workers to receive a paid leave to attend courses for obtaining a primary school certificate that are sponsored by public schools was first introduced in Italy in the mid-seventies, due to a strong role played by the workers' unions. Nonetheless, at present, Italy does not yet have a well structured system of adult education at a state level (Farinelli, 2010). However, several typologies of education and training provisions exist, which are managed by the state, regional governments, local institutions, social partners and private companies. These include:

- (1) General adult education aiming at increasing educational levels of the over-16 adult population, for the acquisition of primary and secondary school qualifications. This is provided by upper secondary schools, in the form of evening classes, and adult education centres, i.e. permanent territorial centres established in 1997 by Ministerial Order and transformed in 2008 into provincial centres for adult education, both belonging to the state school system.
- (2) Continuing professional training with the specific goal of providing qualifications and upgraded professional skills among employed and unemployed workers, in order to improve company efficiency and competitiveness, employability, mobility and better career paths for workers. This typology of

provision is administered by municipalities and provinces, companies and business associations, as well as public and private bodies for the continuing training of specific categories, i.e. health, transportations, agriculture, etc., and the Inter-professional Funds. The Inter-professional Funds are a tool through which workers' unions and business associations finance "*business, sector and local training programmes*" – also on an 'individual' basis, i.e. upon request by individual employees with the consent of their employers.

- (3) Non-formal adult education aiming at cultural development of the adult population, through the acquisition of basic, transversal and specific skills, e.g. foreign languages and computer skills. This is primarily run by popular universities, labour associations, as well as public and private entities such as libraries, museums, theatres, private foundations and associations.

In addition, all adult education providers can run courses of Italian as a second language aimed at those whose mother tongue is not Italian, with particular focus on immigrants with diverse cultural backgrounds.

## Sweden

Sweden has a long tradition in adult education, and particularly in liberal adult education. Available education and training provisions for the adult population include three main typologies (Andersson & Köpsén, 2010):

- (1) Formal, general adult education at the primary and secondary levels, which has a compensatory function for early school leavers. This type of provision follows a national curriculum and is equivalent to the corresponding level of education for youngsters. By law, municipalities must provide formal adult education at primary and lower secondary levels but can decide whether to provide formal adult education at upper secondary levels. Further, they are free to commission other providers to arrange formal adult education, e.g. private companies, folk high schools and study associations.
- (2) Vocational adult education primarily aimed at fulfilling labour market needs, with a focus on training for vocations experiencing labour shortages, and re-qualifying the unemployed. This typology of provision is partly included in formal municipal adult education, through which the same national curriculum as vocational courses of upper secondary schools is offered. However, it also covers advanced vocational education, governed by a national agency and commissioned to certified providers, which in 2009 was replaced by higher vocational education, now under the newly-established Swedish National Agency of Higher Vocational Education. Still to be considered within the vocational adult education provision is labour market education commissioned by the Public Employment Office, and commissioned to private edu-

cation companies, and to a limited extent to higher education or municipal adult education organisations.

- (3) Liberal adult education includes courses based on an individual's needs and the needs of a democratic society as such. It has no formal relation to the state in terms of a governing agency, etc., although it receives extensive subsidies and its main providers, Folk High Schools and Study Associations, are monitored by the Swedish Council for Adult Education, upon the state's request.

## **2.2. Adult educators: The profession's social status**

### **Denmark**

In Denmark, the official requirements for teachers of adults differ greatly between the three sectors of: general, vocational and liberal adult education (Milana & Larson, 2010). In the field of general adult education, only special education, which includes education for dyslectics and Danish as second language, requires teachers to not only possess subject-specific qualifications but also specialised pedagogical qualifications in teaching adults. Teachers of the remaining courses are required to hold the same pedagogical qualification as school teachers of either primary or secondary levels, besides subject-specific knowledge and qualifications. In the field of vocationally-oriented adult education, while both subject-specific qualifications and professional experience are formally requested, no specific pedagogical qualifications are required before entering the profession. According to recent legislation, the Danish Ministry of Education, in agreement with the Council for vocationally-oriented adult and continuing education, is expected to revise the qualification requirements for teachers within the field of labour market training. In the field of liberal adult education, qualification criteria for teachers depend upon specific employment criteria set by each provider. Although teachers within adult education have been organised since 2009 under one common organisation, the Educational Confederation, their terms of employment vary between the three sectors. Collective agreements stating rights in case of illness, holidays etc. exist for teachers within general and vocationally-oriented adult education and only to a limited extent in some branches of liberal adult education, which in comparison has limited rights recognised and protected by the Educational Confederation.

### **Estonia**

In Estonia, no official qualification requirements exist (Jõgi & Gross, 2010). In recent years, however, much attention has been paid to the definition of the Professional Qualification Standard for adult educators in Estonia, contrasting its Nordic counterparts. According to the Professional Standard, introduced in 2004:

*“The adult educator is a specialist intermediating skills and/ or knowledge to adult people, directing their formation of comprehension and attitudes, and supporting their self-development in adult general education, job-related and/ or continuing professional training, popular education courses, study circles and other circumstances related to a purposeful learning situation. The adult educator creates a positive and motivating learning environment that assists the learners in accomplishing the goals of their learning in the best possible manner. In order to achieve better results, s/he includes additional resources (other instructors, specialists, learners etc.), if the need becomes evident” (ibid., p. 16).*

Since 2007, the Professional Qualification Standard is competence-based and applicants are required to undertake specific training in the field of adult education so to complement prior education and training attainments in the subject(s) they teach. Only in recent years, a precise description of levels from the second to the fifth ones has developed, as provided in the Estonian and European system of qualifications. Opportunities for adult educators to prove their professional qualifications have also been extended. In 2004, the right to prove a qualification was accorded to three levels only (III, IV and V). Since 2007, it has been possible to acquire professional qualification as an adult educator at four levels (level II was added, giving less experienced adult educators the opportunity to apply for qualification).

Applying for the Professional Qualification Certificate at any of these levels is still a voluntary process and is considered as an additional qualification to subject-specific qualifications acquired via prior education and training and on-the-job. The Professional Qualification Certificate helps in increasing competitiveness among education services, thus giving a guarantee to users, employers and contracting entities. Only the most well-established centres for vocational training can take full-time staff; usually adult educators have part-time contracts and teach at the same time in different institutions.

## **Italy**

In Italy, no measures have been adopted so far in policies relating to the development of continuing education, e.g. general adult education, on-the-job training, continuing education managed by labour unions and educational opportunities promoted by non-profit associations, which reflects the conviction that specialised professional skills are required for teaching adults (cf. Farinelli, 2010). Teachers employed in adult education centres, i.e. general adult education, are recruited and trained as school teachers, have a degree in a specific discipline relating to the subject they teach and sometimes benefit from on-the-job training opportunities. Within vocational training activities carried out under the responsibility of regional governments and the Inter-professional Funds, the accreditation of agencies does not foresee the possession of specialised competences in the field of adult education. In some regions and autonomous provinces there are, however, professional registers of educators which assign points for professional experience gained in the

field. For the most part, educators in popular universities and non-profit associations, some of which are volunteer staff, are only required to have competences related to the discipline in which they will be teaching. On the other hand, there is a great deal of activity involving on-the-job training, above all for teaching that requires sophisticated didactic tools. This is the case, for example, of teachers of Italian as a second language.

There are essentially two channels of recruitment in the job training system:

- From within the system, where adult educators responds to job vacancies advertised, perform job searches, or are ex-students;
- Through informal channels, with the help of friends and relatives.

Despite some signs of increased social desirability, it must be said that the profession of teacher/trainer of adults is weak, both in terms of social recognition and subjective perception. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that the teacher/trainer profession is a young one, as compared to the more traditional one of school teacher, and that in any case, it is a profession which is multi-dimensional and borderline, and thus lacks an established image in society. It is not by chance that many teachers/trainers of adults find difficulty in explaining their professional tasks to people outside the field.

## Sweden

In Sweden, despite the long tradition of adult education, formal training courses and professional training are not so widespread. There is no regulated definition of cultural and professional requirements for adult educators, and, when requirements exist, the qualification is that of other school teachers (Andersson & Köpsén, 2010). In general, adult educators are required to have the same qualifications as primary and/or secondary school teachers, and subject knowledge is valued higher than specific skills for teaching adults. The requirements for teachers in vocational municipal adult education are the same as for teachers in corresponding courses in upper secondary school. In advanced/higher vocational education, there are no official requirements for teachers. When it comes to labour market education, no formal requirements for teachers exist either, given that this type of education is not part of the formal adult education provision. The same applies to folk high school teachers. Neither are there any formal requirements for the leaders of study circles, and they often work on a voluntary basis. The recruitment of teachers of adults, thus, does not necessarily follow formal criteria, resulting in professional and cultural backgrounds that are very different. For instance, the shortage of professional trainers leads to the employment of adult educators without a teaching qualification. Recently, a reform of teacher education has been planned for, in which some, but limited, attention is focused on adult education and training of adult educators. This reform is still in preparation.

## 2.3. Discussion

20 | In the four countries covered by the BAEA project, adult education has a different history and evolution; hence, it presents country-specific characterisations in the roles held by the public and private sectors, in the responsibilities of different institutional and social actors, in the regulatory apparatuses for different typologies of provision and in other aspects, as highlighted in the prior sections. Despite these diversities, a common trait is identified in the presence of three distinguishable typologies of educational offerings: general education, vocational education and training, and liberal education, provided respectively in the field of formal education oriented towards the achievement of educational qualification, in the field of workers' vocational training and in the field of non-formal education, oriented towards the development of culture and citizenship. The countries with a consolidated tradition in the field of adult education, namely Denmark and Sweden, show higher rates of participation in learning activities, however every country presents considerable dynamics of development, even if the data on the number of people that supply this service and data on the capability to respond to the training demand aren't surveyed by means of reliable statistical analysis.

### **Increased opportunities for on-the-job training**

In addition, we have noticed a growing interest for on-the-job training as an enrichment opportunity, or as a professional reconversion for people introduced to the labour market, or as employability development for the jobless, and as an intervention aimed at balancing the relationship between the supply and demand of specific and rare capabilities in the labour market. For example, in 2009, Sweden launched a special initiative aimed at developing a "higher vocational education", which replaced the advanced vocational education promoted during the late 1990s; while labour market education – an educational training promoted by politics, which is situated out of the formal system and is entrusted to private institutions – offers skills assessment and other formative activities for the unemployed who are at least 25 years old. In Italy, in 2000, the Inter-professional Funds were established to support the continuous training of workers. The Inter-professional Funds are managed by social partners, which finance training plans for business, sectorial, territorial and individual development. In Denmark, the growing interest of educational politics for the quality of adult education is mainly oriented to increment its effectiveness in comparison to the labour market. In Estonia, more and more in-service training is being offered by professional unions, while public universities and non-academic high level professional training centres arrange evening and distance learning courses attended principally by part-time students. To respond to market needs of cultural and professional competences at the medium-high level as well as the needs of new professional figures, general education traditionally focused on the primary and lower secondary education, i.e. levels 1-2 of the Interna-

tional Standard Classification of Education (Isced), and seems to have reoriented itself to also cover upper- and post-secondary and tertiary education, i.e. Isced levels 3-5. This is the case in Italy and Sweden and, to a lesser extent, in Estonia and Denmark. In Italy, this strategy marks recent changes in adult education under the authority of public schools.

### **Higher attention to specific needs**

At the same time, both formal and non-formal adult education in all countries is supplied by public and private providers and competes with new educational and specific needs. In Denmark, Italy and Sweden the provision of courses in national languages or targeting groups with special needs are increasingly regarded as important for the cultural and social integration of immigrants, dyslexics (Denmark), and disabled adults (Sweden).

### **Blurred boundaries between teachers and teachers of adults**

In all countries under investigation, with no exceptions, the professional profile of an adult educator has not yet been fully identified, recognised, and regulated so as to include all the distinguishable characteristics of the profession such as:

- Cultural and professional skills that distinguish it from other educational professions;
- Initial training and recruitment criteria;
- Conditions of employment;
- Trade union and/or professional representation.

Moreover, it is significant that in Estonia, where a Professional Qualification Standard was established in 2004, professional qualification is additional to that achieved in the subject to be taught at a university level or in any other educational institution, and voluntary. This situation, which contrasts the processes of defining a strong professional identity and the perception of specificity of one's own work that often characterises adults' teachers, can be explained by the fact that adult education is a much younger profession in comparison to the school-teaching of children and teenagers, as well as workplace training and tutoring. Certainly, it is very important that these professions have traditionally been largely characterised by the cultural and professional mastery of taught subjects than by pedagogical and methodological-didactic qualifications. This second aspect is definitely present in Italy where most teachers, especially in secondary education, have a training background that is predominantly disciplinary, and where professional qualifications of the pedagogical and didactic types mainly evolve through on-the-job training. Also, to those who work in the vocational training of workers, the competence resulting from work experience is required above all. At the same time, in all countries under

examination there is a debate surrounding the specific qualification of adult educators and specialised training programmes, although unevenly distributed across all three sectors in which adult education is diffused. In the planned reform of teacher education in Sweden, the attention is to some extent also focused on adult education and its teachers; while in Italy, the question of the specificity of this kind of professional profile, despite having been repeatedly pointed out in political acts and in regulations related to adult education, has not resulted in concrete evidence in terms of recruitment and employment.

### **Uneven professional representation and social protection**

The widespread state of uncertainty on the consistency and professional status of adult educators is reflected in the history and forms of trade union and professional representation and, consequently, also in the diversity of working conditions. All teachers of adults in Denmark, in spite of the sector in which they are employed, are now a part of the Confederation of Education, which associates school teachers, managers, counsellors, etc. In Italy, adult educators that teach in schools belong, without recognition of specificity, to trade unions that also involve managerial, technical, administrative and auxiliary employees; only a small part of professional trainers have trade union representation and trainers used by the Inter-professional Funds for the continuous training of workers and teachers in liberal education have no form of representation. In Sweden, only adult educators who work in folk high schools are organised in a separate union for adult educators, while adult educators in other sectors belong to the same unions as other categories of teachers. In short, although employment conditions differ extensively within and between countries, usually, adult educators who work in the public sector are those who enjoy greater protection, in contrast to those in liberal adult education.

# Chapter 3: Structural conditions for professional development

By Anne Larson

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The aim of this chapter is to present the structural conditions that promote and set the limits for (prospective) adult educators' participation in education and courses qualifying their work within the field. As mentioned in chapter 1, the initial intention was to focus only on those about to enter the profession as adult educators. In practice, however, it was not possible to make a distinction between education and courses for prospective adult educators, on the one hand, and education and courses for people already working within the field, on the other hand. Most of the courses mentioned in section 3.1., thus, are directed at both those interested in becoming adult educators and those already working within the field.

The results presented in this chapter are derived from the desk research (cf. section 1.3.). In the comparison of opportunity structures and policy in the four countries under investigation, the huge differences in historical and structural contexts should be kept in mind. It is thus evident that there will be differences due to factors not directly related to the qualification of adult educators. For instance, the four countries represent a population size ranging from 1.3 million in Estonia to 58.1 million in Italy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2010). In addition, differing from the three other countries, regional governments in Italy have direct responsibility in the field of vocational training; thus involving an extra political decision-making level between the local and national levels, as compared to the other three countries. Finally, according to data from Eurostat (2010), while almost one-third of Danes and Swedes participated in adult education and learning activities in 2007, the figures for Estonia and Italy were below one-in-ten.

## 3.1. Opportunity structures for (prospective) adult educators

In this part, a general overview of the opportunities for qualifying as adult educators in the four countries is presented. These will be further discussed and compared in section 3.3.

### Denmark

Though specific qualifications in teaching adults may not be required for becoming adult educators in Denmark, there are many providers of publicly supported qualification for adult educators and many opportunities for those interested in qualifying in the teaching of adults – from short courses (down to approximately three

weeks' duration) at a basic level, to one-year full-time programmes at the master level. While there are no entry requirements for basic courses, there are requirements for others related to relevant work experience as well as prior education within a subject or profession. Thus, the last group of courses are mainly aimed at practitioners already working within the field. For some courses (professional post-graduate teacher training) enrolment is further restricted to individuals who have recently become employed as adult educators.

There is no set progression between the different courses and programmes and none of them are part of the ordinary education system. These courses are defined as 'adult education'. Qualifying as an adult educator does not appear to be something one considers to do as a young person entering the labour market for the first time. Instead, the opportunity structures promote the understanding that educating adults is a career one enters into later in life (Milana & Larson, 2010).

## **Estonia**

Since the introduction of a Professional Qualification Standard for adult educators in 2004, there has been a focus on the qualification of adults. Notwithstanding, holding a professional certificate is not mandatory to teach in the field of adult education and pedagogical qualifications are still considered as supplementary, while the main qualification is the profession or specialist knowledge acquired in prior education either from university or from vocational education related to the subject(s) the adult educator teaches.

The qualifications for adult educators in Estonia are mainly offered by two organisations: the Association of Estonian Adult Educators and the Estonian Non-Formal Adult Education Association, both non-governmental institutions. The length of the courses on offer varies from that of a short course of 80 hours' duration, to a two-year course lasting a total of 824 hours. Bachelor and master degree studies in adult education are offered by Tallinn University, but those graduating from these studies become managers in adult education and not adult educators as defined in this project. Most of the courses are aimed at individuals already working as adult educators. The courses offered by the two organisations as well as by Tallinn University are linked to the Professional Qualification Standard, making it possible for participants to apply for a certificate after the completion of a course (Jõgi & Gross, 2010).

## **Italy**

Though becoming an adult educator in Italy is more likely to be something that just happens, rather than the result of a conscious choice, and initial education and training for adult educators is optional, rather than a prerequisite for entering the profession. However, courses and programmes for adult educators do exist. These are offered at different levels by different providers and target different sectors of the adult education system. The actual offers differ between regions. The existing

courses, however, are mainly aimed at practitioners already working within the field, while very few options exist for those interested in becoming adult educators. Within the liberal adult education, training courses in e.g. didactics are carried out for both prospective and experienced adult educators. Courses run by the Popular University of Rome (UPTER), involved in the BAEA project, are an example. Also within ordinary universities, there are courses offering qualification to (prospective) adult educators (Farinelli, 2010).

## Sweden

In spite of adult education playing a vital role in Sweden, formal education and training for adult educators is not very widespread. Only two programmes are specifically aimed at (prospective) adult educators. One is a 60 ECTS education programme for educators within liberal adult education. The programme is offered by Linköping University. To enrol in the programme, the (prospective) adult educators are expected to have prior studies within the subject they intend to teach. Another is a non-academic course that also targets adult educators within liberal adult education. The course that is equivalent to ten weeks of full-time study has been offered by Brunnsvik Folk High School.

Other programmes at the academic level are teacher education programmes offered by universities and university colleges. The teaching degree obtained from those programmes qualify one to teach adults at the levels covered, however the programmes are not directed specifically at adult educators, though some universities mention in their programme descriptions that they prepare students to teach adults. The programmes normally range between three years and five and one-half years of full-time studies.

Further, it is possible for those interested in qualifying as adult educators to take part in single courses at a basic level at the universities as well as in-service training offered by adult education providers, e.g. study associations (Andersson & Köpsén, 2010).

## 3.2. National policy strategies for adult learning

This part describes the national policy strategies for adult education and training in each of the four countries. The description covers adult education policy as such, but the focus is on policy related to (initial) education and training for (prospective) adult educators after 2000, the year of the European Union's council meeting in Lisbon that put lifelong learning on the European political agenda for real. The results will be discussed in section 3.3.

## Denmark

In Denmark, there is a long tradition of adult education and training, dating back to the 17th Century. Notably, the first folk high school was established in 1844 (Korsgaard, 1997). Though adult education and the qualification of adult educators were on the political agenda prior to the Lisbon summit, the importance of adult education has gained increased attention from 2000 and on. Lifelong learning became a main principle in Danish education policy, stressing the need for education and training from kindergarten through to old age. The recent financial crisis, however, challenged the implementation of the ambition of lifelong learning for all. As an example, education grants for adults, according to a May-2010 agreement between the government and the Danish People's Party, will be reduced by 20 percent. Paralleling this will be a rise in fees for participating in adult education and training (Danish Government, 2010).

Though the years up to 2000 witnessed an interest not only in adult education and training, but also in the qualifications of those teaching adults, the situation since 2000 has been mainly characterised by an interest in the increased supply of adult education and training of relevance to the labour market. Meanwhile, the issue of the qualification of adult educators has been relatively absent in policy papers. One exception provisions from two 2006 reports that present a strategy for a reform of the Danish adult education and training system. These were published by a committee composed of representatives from the government/ministries and labour market organisations. In these reports, the qualification of adult educators is mentioned, but is not discussed in detail. Further, the qualification of adult educators was not cited in meetings that ensued between the government and labour market organisations, following the publication of these reports (Milana & Larson, 2010).

## Estonia

The situation in Estonia is special due to the fact that the country only recently became independent, in 1991, and became member of the European Union in 2004. As a result, and during the last twenty years, Estonia has witnessed significant political, ideological, economic, cultural and social changes. In 1993, the Estonian Parliament passed an Act with respect to adult education, and thus, lifelong learning and adult education have been among the country's priorities in relation to development in Estonia.

Since the country became member of the European Union, the adult education system in Estonia has been subject to recurrent reforms that focus on equal opportunities and aim to increase participation in adult education and training. The European Union's strategy for lifelong learning, thus, plays a significant role for the design of Estonia's lifelong learning policy. The ambitious strategies for lifelong learning, however, are not fully implemented in day-to-day education policy. Estonia's lifelong learning policy is closely related to the labour market policy. Both the

act on social protection for the unemployed and the act on labour market services include work-related training paid-for by the state.

Though the strategies mainly focus on the supply and demand of adult education and training, Estonia is the only of the four countries who implemented a Professional Qualification Standard for adult educators as described above, indicating an awareness of the role played by adult educators in the quality of adult education provisions (Jõgi & Gross, 2009a,b).

## Italy

As mentioned in section 2.1.3., the government and unions entered an agreement in 1972 granting workers the right to re-enter education with a set number of hours to be paid for by employers. This resulted in an increase in adult participation in education and training, though the proportion of Italians that participate in adult education and training is still below the European average. As a consequence of the increased amount of adults taking part in education and training, an offer for adult educators was established, targeting new as well as experienced adult educators.

Since 2000, the adult education policy in Italy has been aimed at developing the European Union's lifelong learning policy. In March 2000, the Italian government, together with regional and local authorities, entered an agreement on the re-organisation of continuing adult education. Among the targets of the agreement was the promotion of participation in adult education and training. The agreement also stressed the need for qualified adult educators "*with specific professional competences*" (cited in Farinelli, 2010, p. 19). The implementation of the agreement, however, varies across the country, and in some cases it has been very scarce. Further, the initiatives taken thus far to increase the qualifications of adult educators have only dealt with on-the-job training and not with initial education and training of adult educators. In 2009, the Italian government approved a regulation dealing with adult education delivered by public schools, thus reorganising the centres for adult education that were first established in 1997. In the regulation, priority was given to the acquisition of qualifications at primary and high school levels.

In spite of the apparent intent to increase participation in adult education and training and attention on the need for qualification of adult educators in the 1997 agreement, no measures have been adopted so far to provide adult educators with the needed competences (Farinelli, 2010).

## Sweden

Like Denmark, Sweden has an especially long tradition for liberal adult education. The first folk high schools were established in the 19th Century, and today not only the present liberal education but also general adult education has its roots within the tradition of liberal adult education in the form of evening school organised by study associations. Notwithstanding, the status of adult education and training in Swedish education policy seems to have changed over the years. General adult edu-

cation offered by municipalities in the years 1982 to 1994 followed a unique national curriculum. Yet, from 1994 on, primary and secondary education began adhering to a single national curriculum which does not distinguish between youngsters and adults. However, in line with the three other countries examined, Swedish policy on adult education and training has been aimed at increasing participation. At the same time, earmarked subsidies from the state to municipalities offering general adult education have been eliminated.

Recently, vocational education and training has received particular attention; in 2009, a special initiative was launched to increase the vocational part of municipal adult education. Among other initiatives is a renewal of state subsidies, but this time earmarked for vocational education and training, rather than general adult education.

In spite of the long tradition for adult education and training, and the recent intent to increase participation in vocational adult education and training, qualification for those going to teach adults has not gained much attention in Sweden either. An exception is a 2008 official report produced by the Swedish Ministry of Education on the reform of Swedish teacher education. The report described teachers in upper secondary school and adult educators as a special category of teachers, with the implication that they would be able to obtain an education that focussed more on their role as adult educators. However, in the 2010 final proposal from the Ministry of Education, the role of the adult educator is less pronounced and formal adult education is no longer explicitly stated as a field of practice for teachers at upper secondary levels (Andersson & Köpsén, 2010).

### 3.3. Discussion

In this part, a synthesis of the comparison between the four countries is presented, highlighting some common trends and tendencies.

#### **Initial education versus in-service training of adult educators**

For all four countries, it is characteristic that though there are no formal requirements in the qualification of adult educators to be employed within the field, for those interested in qualifying, a number of options exist. As mentioned in the introduction to the chapter, in most cases, it is however not possible to make a clear distinction between courses and programmes aimed at prospective adult educators and in-service courses for those already working within the field. Further, when such a distinction can be made, it seems always to be in favour of the experienced adult educators. Options for initial education and training for prospective adult educators aimed at preparing them for entering the field, thus, are limited in all four countries. For some courses, being employed and/or experienced as an adult educator is an entry requirement. Though some courses offer basic pedagogical and di-

dactic qualification for adult educators, they are not restricted to new adult educators but are typically also open to experienced educators who feel the need for pedagogical and didactical upgrading.

### **Short courses and higher education programmes in adult education**

In all four countries, education and training for adult educators is offered at different levels, ranging from very short courses being offered at very basic levels through to higher education programmes at bachelor and master levels. The providers of education programmes for adult educators are mainly universities and other higher education institutions. University-level courses exist in all four countries. They are either full-time degrees or part of a wider programme of study. They are however not always restricted to study of education for adults, and they are not always part of the ordinary educational system. This is also the case for courses offered by another kind of provider: liberal adult education institutions, as the umbrella organisation for non-formal adult education in Estonia and the People's University of Rome (Italy). In Denmark, adult education courses and education programmes are part of adult education and training provisions. By defining programmes aimed at qualifying adult educators as adult education, becoming an adult educator is implicitly defined as a career one enters into later in life, and not as a first choice taken by a young person about to enter the labour market.

### **Adult education and labour market relevance**

Another general trend in all four countries studied is an apparent focus on labour market need and labour market relevance when it comes to adult education and training. This can for instance be seen in the increased priority given to vocational education and training in Swedish policy and the Danish definition of quality of adult education as being useful for the labour market. There is, thus, no doubt that adult education policy in all four countries is more in line with the human capital focus on adult education put forward by the OECD and the European Union, among others, than the understanding of lifelong learning put forward by an organisation like UNESCO. It is, thus, striking that the Danish reform of the adult education system initiated in 2006 referenced lifelong skills upgrading and not lifelong learning.

### **Lack of real attention on the qualifications of adult educators**

Another common trend is an apparent lack of interest in the qualification of those teaching adults, as seen in policy papers. The main focus in the papers is on increasing participation in adult education and training, while only very few of the papers mention the need to qualify the teachers and even fewer provide any reflection or suggestions as to how that could be realised. This is especially interesting in relation to the coming Swedish reform of teacher education – in general – and how the process of reform downplayed the role of the adult educator from the first

2008 reform report to the final 2010 proposal for reform. The only exception seems to be in Estonia, with the introduction of a Professional Qualification Standard for adult educators.

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**Ambitious strategies are not always implemented**

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Finally, there seems to be a discrepancy between the ambitions stated in strategies and other policy papers, and the actual policy carried out at country levels. Strikingly, there are indications that actual policy, in some cases, is contradictory to strategies' aims, while several ambitious intentions are not ever undertaken.

# Chapter 4: Individual paths of professionalisation

By Larissa Jögi & Marin Gross

*“If it had not been an official request from my workplace [to enrol in the course], I do not think I would have gone this way.” Birgitte (DK)*

*My professional path has been short but I already have something to talk about, I’ve had choices...obstacles...joys...and there’s going to be a lot to experience and learning.” Jana (EE)*

*“This wasn’t my first choice, I wanted to study psychology...but unfortunately I didn’t pass the admission test ...” Bianca (IT)*

*“My workmates said: “Why don’t you study to become a teacher?” I had thought of it many years ago, to become a teacher in nursing, but I had forgotten it! Now it came alive again, through my mates.” Lena (SE)*

This chapter presents some of the findings from the field research activity (cf. section 1.3.). The results from country-specific analysis (Andersson & Köpsén, 2010; Farinelli, 2010; Jögi & Gross, 2010; Milana & Larson, 2010) are presented here as a synthesis overview, showing how those acting or willing to act as adult educators in the countries covered by the project constructed their paths to adult education. It also explores what led them to enter specialised studies in the field of adult education. Becoming an adult educator in Denmark, Estonia, Italy and Sweden signifies that a person has taken a significant and rather new step forward in his/her own life and professional career. The general tendency is that the knowledge, understandings, values and the identity of an adult educator are influenced by personal life and life experience, social and cultural aspects, educational possibilities and professional practice, and are developed through current studies, professional work, personal and learning experiences and reflection on the self, one’s life and one’s work.

## 4.1. Paths to adult education

The paths to adult education, always self-constructed, non-linear, and atypical, are influenced by individual motives and social-cultural aspects. Aspects of career path tasks can be recycled throughout personal and professional life spans as changes occur in career paths and life roles (McAuliffe, 2006). There is no clear pattern in adult educators’ career paths: they appear heterogeneous. Training adults in the classical sense of career is either a progression or a regression, but in every case, a

career is sensed as a professional or personal challenge and as an opportunity for self-realisation.

In the countries under investigation, becoming an adult educator was rarely the result of an intentional choice, which is related with paralleling work and studies (DK, EE, IT, SE). In the context of one's own career, it is more a case of using possibilities and suppositions as one comes across them, rather than a conscious and planned process (EE). Becoming an adult educator is also related with several shortcuts or turning points in one's personal life and work (DK, EE, SE). Turning to adult training may have been influenced by current work (DK), changes in life (DK, EE, SE) and current studies (EE). Study that was undertaken in university (EE, SE) or qualification courses was often described by interviewees as enlightening or very significant and influential (EE).

The professional backgrounds of the interviewees vary extensively, as each belonged to different professional groups: pedagogues (DK, EE, IT, SE), healthcare workers (DK), nurses (DK), police officers (DK), military officers (EE), librarians (DK, EE), museum pedagogues (EE), teachers in vocational educational institutions (DK, EE, IT), human resource managers (EE), teachers in folk high schools (SE, EE), and adult trainers (DK, EE, SE).

The educational background, although not deeply investigated, seems to have had a specific meaning in the context of career paths (SE), and an influence on decision making and the identification of new professional opportunities (DK, EE, IT, SE).

Individual choices and decisions have been influenced by individual attitudes, objective factors, possibilities and dispositional factors like personal life and learning experiences, triggers in life, etc. Hence, adult education represented quite a new professional context for most interviewees.

Also, processes in society, social and economical changes influenced interviewees' choices and opportunities to becoming adult educators (EE). Opportunities to work as an adult educator were made possible in new structures and institutions in Estonia, i.e. such as in the Defence League, public enterprises, training and consulting centres, non-profit organisations, and in popular new fields of training, i.e. management, teamwork, sales training and computer training.

Individual paths were very different, accidental or non-accidental, short or long, simple or complicated, as everybody has had different personal/dispositional and situational contexts which bore influence on their choices.

For many, however, the path to adult education had been influenced by previous professional contexts and experiences (DK, EE, IT, SE) and current work experiences (EE), by continuing education or interests or voluntary activities (EE), limited number of opportunities (IT, DK), different aspects from personal biographies (DK, EE, IT, SE) and trigger-events like illness (DK, SE), accidental circumstances (IT), family contexts and social relations (DK, EE, SE, IT).

Teaching adults was rarely the result of an internal choice implemented by interviewees; it was something that came along within the context of other profes-

sional activities (DK, EE, IT, SE). For some, becoming a teacher of adults was a ‘plan B’ and/or a second-best alternative (EE, SE) – often resulting from an interest and affection for a specific subject (SE). In other words, most interviewees had gotten into a situation where they had to start their lives over again because their normal life cycles had been interrupted or they had started to search for new directions in their lives (DK, EE), not least as in cases where they met a new partner or had children (DK).

## 4.2. Choice of current studies

Initial education and training of adult educators has been the interest and obligation of adult educators themselves. Thus it is important to look at the motives interviewees had for attending specialised studies in adult education.

Further studies were seen as an important turning point for becoming an adult educator and carry a significant role in individual paths to the profession. Most interviewees expressed great hope in the fact that the studies they were undertaking will support their professional and personal development, self-development, understandings in how to teach and support adults in learning processes and that the creation of a feeling of belonging to a community of practice would be reinforced. The two main incentives for participating in further studies were identified as:

- Individual motives
- External demands

The most important motives of the individual kind were that interviewees had a strong interest in studies, which is reflected in their lifelong attitudes towards learning (EE, SE). Attitudes were influenced by aspects of their socio-cultural environments and individual personalities. Understanding the self and the self as an educator – also in a future perspective – were influential motives; hence, entering specialised studies was deemed a systematic way of analysing and learning about the self (EE).

Also, the need to belong to a broader community of adult educators was expressed as an individual motive to undertaking studies (DK, EE, SE); while the need to make a commitment to society was also revealed as strong motive, especially among some Swedish interviewees who were working or willing to work in liberal adult education.

Entering specialised studies in adult education was seen by some interviewees as a way of seeking confirmation or formal recognition of prior knowledge that had been acquired over the time of practise in the field (DK, EE, IT, SE). New knowledge, and especially theoretical knowledge, was also expected to be gained by means of specialised studies (EE). The need for new knowledge was linked to an

awareness of current experiences and knowledge that the interviewees held, and the recognition that there was a need to improve their own practise of teaching (DK, EE, SE). A self-realisation that teaching adults was more than telling about what one knows also led to the participation in specialised studies (DK). Interviewees also emphasised that in order for learners to learn, they needed to know how to approach the learners and create an environment for dialogue and learning. They expected to acquire the necessary tools and techniques for that by means of specialised studies, as a way towards improving one's own professional practice (DK, EE, SE).

A bundle of motives were related to work life, such as wanting to change the present situation at work or changing the job profile but keeping the vocational knowledge already possessed (DK, IT). Changing workplaces or professions seemed normal in the context of the free market economy, and thus giving up an existing job and choosing adult training seemed a natural choice for many (EE).

External demands were mostly linked to changes in society, including the labour market. Unemployment in individual professional fields had created a need for professional reorientation (SE). The Danish sample is unique in this respect as most of the interviewees were invited by their employers to acquire further competences as adult educators, but this opportunity was also offered in some cases in Sweden. Enrolment at an employer's request, however, was mostly consistent with individual motives (DK).

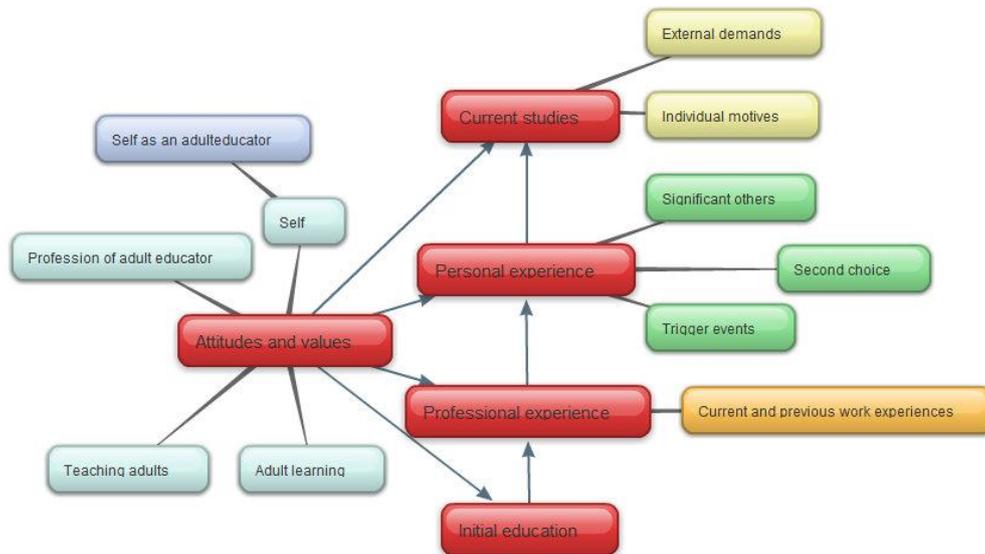
Significant others were pointed out as influential for interviewees' choice to enter new studies (DK, EE, SE). Significant others include educators whose courses they had attended in the past, friends and colleagues who had already entered the field of adult education and family members.

### 4.3. Discussion

Due to life course and individual career paths, prospective adult educators are in a special position among professionals because through prior studies, they gain a profession, but they usually do not possess formal qualification for teaching adults. Prior learning does not include specialist knowledge, specific teaching skills or adult learning specialities. Their personal lives and life experiences act as a frame for choices that are made possible.

Prospective adult educators have a self-understanding as adult educators, which give meanings. Meanings about the self are connected with social learning, personal experiences and institutional learning that make it possible to notice others who are influential on making choices. Further initial studies also have an important impact on professionalisation processes. The more aware an adult educator is of him/herself and what is important and valued, the more aware and understandable he/she is in his/her professional activity as an adult educator. In short, the professional identity of an adult educator is formed in the context of personal

life, social life, and current studies. Thus, it is important to understand individual motives and external demands in the path to adult education and current studies.



*Illustration: Structure of aspects influencing the formation of a path*

To conclude, it seems possible to highlight that key aspects of a professional identity, as defined in the literature (Bruner, 2001; Olesen, 2007) were partly present among the interviewees: self-cognition; self-understanding; awareness of the self; cognitive aspects (assumptions, attitudes, motives); emotional aspects (values, contentment); and social aspects (significant others, social relations, belonging to a learning community). These aspects help to understand that identity-building processes among (prospective) adult educators are a complex phenomenon, and biographical aspects are very important and meaningful parts of such processes. They help policymakers, adult educators' trainers and adult educators understand and value processes of professional identity-building and socialisation among prospective adult educators.

# Chapter 5: Configurations of the professional context

This chapter brings together and discusses evidence of professional identity-building processes among current and prospective adult educators. In order to shed some light on these processes, we asked interviewees to elicit their perceptions of the self in the vocational context and to share their predictions for future development. The results summarised in the next two sections were analysed at a national level and presented in single-country reports submitted as part of the BAEA project. As already mentioned (cf. chapter 1), the researchers shared a methodological framework and applied a common method for data collection; however, the data under scrutiny also reflects variations in the interviewees' interpretations and life conditions and the researchers' styles in pursuing this type of investigation. Moreover, the breadth and depth of national presentations were rather uneven. In spite of these methodological pitfalls, a few main points can be drawn, which may help to acquire a better understanding of identity-building processes among current and prospective adult educators in the countries under consideration. These are discussed in the concluding section.

## 5.1. Defining the self in the vocational context

### Denmark

Responses by the Danish interviewees to the request to define the self in the vocational context show a certain degree of variation; however, it was still possible to recognise strong similarities. These led to the identification of four main categorisations (Milana & Larson, 2010).

A sub-group of interviewees focused on the inner challenges experienced in connection to (i) repositioning the self in relation to the institution in which one works; (ii) getting recognition and acceptance by the learners as well as by colleagues; and (iii) thinking differently from what one had been used to, up to the time one entered into specialised studies in the field of adult education.

A second categorisation reflects the views of those who placed a special emphasis on the teaching-learning transaction. They described themselves in the vocational context in relation to the learners. This was specially the case for interviewees who had been affected by institutional changes; they had to rethink their roles at work in terms of supervisors rather than teachers in the traditional sense. They faced new challenges in creating connections between the theoretical foundation of

their profession and everyday educational practices, as well as in balancing their will to give space to the learners' expressions of the self while confronting them so to promote 'significant learning'.

An additional category accounts for interviewees perceiving the self as one who holds a position in which one could influence learning processes, through the design and management of teaching activities and by supervising students.

Lastly, some interviewees defined the self in relation to colleagues; hence, collegiality, i.e. working in teams and contributing to the realisation of shared tasks and activities became a central feature influencing the way in which these interviewees perceived the self in a vocational context and built their identities as adult educators.

## **Estonia**

When asked to define the self in the vocation context, the Estonian interviewees who already possessed first-hand experience in educating adults and had possibilities for self-reflection on their own professional experience, expressed more clear and consistent views, as compared to the rest of the Estonian sample (Jõgi & Gross, 2010). These views were grouped by Jõgi and Gross (ibid.) under two main categories: (i) professional development through work and training; and (ii) self-realisation. The interviewees' view on professional development through work and training emphasised the interaction between these two types of learning experiences. Learning on the job as well as by ad hoc training were considered complementary aspects for both professional and personal development, i.e. "*The more I understand my work, the better choices I make, I understand people I work with more and also understand myself better*" (cited in ibid., p. 33). Self-development, although considered an important aspect, was essential for interviewees who defined the self in the professional context by addressing inner fulfilment as a core element. As expressed by one interviewee: "*For fulfilling the roles of adult educators you need to fulfil these within yourself*" (ibid.).

## **Italy**

The views presented by the Italian interviewees when defining the self in the vocational context presented a high degree of internal variation between two major tendencies, which focused either (i) on the indefinite nature of the profession and its low social recognition; or (ii) on the intrinsically positive nature of the profession (Farinelli, 2010). Representative of the first tendency are especially the views of interviewees who were undertaking specialised studies at the master level and had little work experience, not always related to their field of study. When defining the self in the professional context, they highlighted the discrepancy between the opportunities for employment as defined by their study programmes and the entry criteria required in those work contexts; hence, they tended to express pessimistic views about the future and had great difficulties in imagining the self – as an adult

educator – in a professional context. These views are fully articulated by the following quote: “*I am already pessimistic myself, and who knows what prospects there are for a professional figure that has nothing behind it*” (cited in *ibid.*, p. 40).

Representative of the tendency that expresses the intrinsically positive nature of the profession were primarily the views of those who were acting as adult educators, often working as volunteers in non-formal learning environments. Although they recognised that the professional does not yet have a well-defined profile and lacks recognition, interviewees’ personal views of the self in the professional context, in these cases, emphasised the relevance of their roles of adult educators for helping people to adjust to rapid societal changes. Special attention was generally bestowed to early-school-leavers, often referred to as drop-outs.

## Sweden

Within the Swedish sample, Andersson and Köpsén (2010) identified three categories of views in terms of the interviewees’ definitions of the self in the vocation context. The first category refers to the relevance of the subject the interviewees teach and the educational contexts in which they act. Within this category, prospective adult educators placed special attention on their knowledge and understanding of the subject to be taught. Meanwhile those interviewees that Andersson and Köpsén define as “un-qualified, but ‘acting’ teachers” (*ibid.*, p. 31), i.e. working as teachers without a teaching degree, seemed more concerned with the characterisation of the educational context in which they perform.

The second category focuses on the relation linking the vocational contexts in which interviewees will act and their development as teachers. Here, interviewees with limited teaching experience expressed a higher concern for achieving personal development rather than acquiring knowledge and understanding of the subject to be taught. On the other hand, those with accumulative experience in teaching adults were more troubled with the development of a professional identity and with motivating adults to learn, i.e. “*The most important thing with the teaching task is to motivate, that they [the learners] should want to learn... That is my most important task*” (cited in *ibid.*, p. 30).

Lastly, a third category draws attention to the interviewees’ teaching methods and the ways in which they communicate and interact in class. While some interviewees were mostly oriented towards the application of specific teaching methods, experienced teachers were most primarily concerned with the challenges of establishing an appropriate relation to the learners, which is “*something you have to think about*” (*ibid.*, p. 31).

## 5.2. Future expectations

### Denmark

The Danish interviewees' future expectations at the time of interviews reflected diversity in individual biographies. Nonetheless, common features led to the identification of two main scenarios (Milana & Larson, 2010). The first scenario deals with the improvement of existing working conditions over short and medium periods. Several interviewees made reference to favourable changing conditions at work. Expected benefits could result in new job tasks and higher influence on how to perform these tasks. Further, they made projections on how to make use of new knowledge acquired through specialised studies. These include: (i) improving one's ability to lead a team, supporting collegial work, etc.; (ii) resisting institutional changes in the public service by teaching social workers how to be more attentive to customers' needs; (iii) more project-oriented work; and (iv) prioritising problem-based approaches, when implementing educational reforms.

The second scenario foresees ways to overcome current working conditions and anticipates new lifelong professional trajectories, often pursued through further studies. These trajectories generally imply a change of workplace and/or type of educational institution, with a tendency to abandon the public sector in favour of either the private sector or self-employment. Although an interviewee argued that "*my dream is certainly to continue to teach, to support learning processes*" (cited in *ibid.*, p. 33), her long-term professional trajectories also predicted leaving the adult education field.

### Estonia

The visions about oneself as an adult educator in the future expressed by Estonian interviewees present three different perspectives (Jõgi & Gross, 2010). One perspective focuses on the relation between (i) individual contentment, i.e. "*I am content with my work*", "*a good adult educator does everything well if he or she enjoys it himself or herself*" (cited in *ibid.*, p. 33); and (ii) professional development in terms of performing different roles, acquiring new skills and carrying out novel activities. The future objective is a better realisation of one's own professional practice.

A second perspective deals with ways of accomplishing self-development, i.e. "*I want to become more self-confident and balanced*" (*ibid.*), which often implies becoming more self-critical and analytical as well as better at reacting quickly in diverse teaching situations.

Lastly, a third perspective depicts visions of professional development through further studies, which can help to fulfil interviewees' expectations to motivate and support learners, i.e. "*an adult educator has to be there when learners need him or her. That means that he or she has a responsibility towards the taught subject and learners*" (*ibid.*).

## Italy

For the Italian sample, it seemed more difficult to foresee long-term perspectives, when asked to express visions for the future; however, two main scenarios surfaced (Farinelli, 2010). The first scenario is strongly affected by the indefinite nature of the profession, which emerged from the interviewees' views of themselves in the professional context (cf. section 5.1.), and deals with strong uncertainty in relation to the future profession due to perceived pitfalls in the Italian labour market system. Interviewees who had not yet entered the labour market especially expressed great hesitation not only with regards to the possibility of finding jobs as adult educators, but also on whether to seek self-employment rather than employment. Only interviewees with prior experiences of internships or training periods in private companies or organisations seemed to possess more positive visions of eventually getting jobs as adult educators.

An alternative scenario was presented by interviewees who had already direct experience in the educational market; hence, they had first-hand experience of the pitfalls of the Italian labour market, with special reference to the adult education field. In order to overcome the uncertainties of working as adult educators in a short-term perspective, they had foreseen continuing training, as clearly elicited in the following quote: "*I intend to continue along this road, but I don't feel I have finished because educating is a profession that forces you to keep learning. I like the metaphor of education as a journey within yourself: this applies to those who have completed their education but also to the educator*" (cited in *ibid.*, p. 41).

## Sweden

Swedish interviewees' expectations for the future varied in the degree of intelligibility and time-span covered. These resulted in three relatively clear scenarios of possible future career progressions (Andersson & Köpsén, 2010). A simpler scenario was described by interviewees who already had positions as teachers of adults or similar. Their visions for the future predicted an intention to remain in or return to prior work positions, with minor adjustments in work tasks, etc. Still, a rather smooth scenario was foreseen by those who did not hold a work position to return to after the completion of specialised studies. They sketched rather vague plans about entering a job in the educational field with unclear intentions towards the type of job or educational institution they may end up at. Although teaching adults is not necessary an explicit goal, it may be a suitable option for some, as expressed in the following quote: "*Now the situation is such that I am glad if I get a job. But it would be great fun to be able to work with adults!*" (cited in *ibid.*, p. 31).

More complex scenarios, however, were forecasted by interviewees who had well-elaborated visions for the future. These include: (i) seeking positions characterised by a certain degree of pedagogical freedom, as for instance in teaching in a 'free school', i.e. a privately-owned school, rather than in a "*giant [publicly owned] school*"; and (ii) aiming at positions that allow one to influence the working context, and

possibly society at large. This will was given expression, for instance, by an interviewee with a foreign background, whose future aspiration was to increase the active involvement of people with foreign backgrounds in the Swedish society and its educational opportunities.

### **5.3. Discussion**

It would be surprising if interviewees across countries exhibited a high degree of consensus in the way they construct the self within their own vocational contexts, as identity-building processes reflect culturally-specific representations of the nature of the profession, and are inseparable from social interactions experienced at work, in educational contexts, etc. (cf. Burr, 1995). This frequently put weight on defining the self in relation to the subject to be taught and people with whom interviewees would interact with daily, i.e. colleagues, learners, and employers. Albeit, it must also be said that types of adult education provisions and learning opportunities are extremely diverse, both within and between countries (cf. chapter 2), and that topical issues, such as institutional changes and labour market structural conditions, also clearly influence an individual's self-perceptions. When it comes to the identification of cross-national similarities, only two somewhat consistent trends emerged.

#### **Seeking social recognition and acceptance at work**

One trend is that in some countries (and most obviously in DK and IT) current and prospective adult educators struggle for social recognition and acceptance at work. This is not necessarily grounded on the relative institutionalisation of adult education practices (which in fact is higher in DK, as compared to IT). Noticeably, it is certainly rooted in a relative low consensus regarding adult education as a well-defined profession. It is worth mentioning that while Danish interviewees belong *de facto* to different recognised professions, e.g. pedagogues, healthcare workers, nurses, police officers, librarians and teachers in higher education institutions, only a minority among Italians interviewees were employed as adult educators by an educational provider.

#### **Contributing to social change through one's profession**

The other trend is that in some countries (and most obviously in EE and IT) current and prospective adult educators seek self-realisation and inner fulfilment by performing a profession that, notwithstanding its social status, is deemed valuable for societal development. In Estonia, which has been affected by important political, ideological, economic, cultural and social changes in the last couple of decades, adult educators recognise the self as an important agent in securing an adjustment to rapid societal changes. Similarly in Italy, current and prospective adult educators

construct the self as an agent of social change, even if due to different socio-economic reasons, i.e. increased level of incoming migration and intercultural tensions, higher unemployment and a general increase of relative poverty.

When it comes to the interviewees' predictions for future development, it is not a revelation that they are strongly influenced by current positionings and perceptions of the self in diversified vocational contexts. Further, they reflect structural conditions that characterise the socio-cultural settings in which our interviewees perform their profession. Country-specific results shortly presented in this chapter, however, also lead to the recognition of two fairly distinguishable trends.

### **Increasing professional influence**

One trend is that in all countries, adult educators who already hold a position in the labour market foresee, as a direct result of further specialised short- and medium-term studies, remarkable improvements in current working conditions. Rarely expressed in economic terms, betterment in working conditions make primarily reference to an increased influence by adult educators over processes and practices that occur at work and, by extensions, over broader processes of societal changes (most evidently in DK and SE). Nevertheless, jobs in the private sector or self-employment are also addressed as crucial achievements in the long-term, so as to reinforce one's own professional influence (especially in DK and IT).

### **Continuing education and training**

The second trend is that in some countries (manifestly in EE and IT) future professional prospects are inseparable from formal education and training at advanced and specialised levels. Although individual reasons for valuing further studies may differ extensively within and between countries, in Estonia further studies seem to be primarily considered as a means to fulfilling personal and professional development in connection to a well-defined professional role, while in Italy, these tend to represent an instrumental way of bettering one's position in the labour market, especially in terms of those having limited paid-work experience.

# Chapter 6: Views on adult educators

By Per Andersson & Susanne Köpsén

In this chapter we will summarise and discuss the views among the interviewees of the four countries concerning what is characteristic of adult educators. This is also discussed in terms of how the prospective adult educators reflected upon the task of teaching adults as compared to teaching youngsters/children. The results show that the views on adult educators vary depending on national contexts as well as individual experiences. There is a rather homogenous view of the ‘ideal’ professional adult educator who has commitment and acts as a facilitator in a horizontal relation to participants. However, the interviewees were essentially aware that the work in practice is influenced by external conditions as well as the personal backgrounds of both participants and the adult educators themselves.

It should be noted that even if we applied a common strategy for sampling and data collection (see chapter 1), there are differences in focus and depth in results from the four countries. This should be understood with the background that the national contexts are different (see chapter 2-3), but also that the method for data collection with narrative interviews invites a variation in stories and answers. This variation will be discussed, and used to provide a broader common picture, in the concluding sections. Another methodological reflection concerns the results covered in section 6.2. Even if the focus of this report is on the professional development of adult educators, we have asked for comparisons to teaching youngsters/children. The reasons for this are that firstly, variation and broadening of perspectives could make interviewees see new things they would not have reflected upon otherwise, and secondly that there are discrepancies between the four countries in terms of differences in formal qualification and in training for school teachers and adult educators. There is also a variation in the interviewees’ prior experiences in teaching, and especially in teaching youngsters/children, which we think is reflected in the richness of data from each country, as presented in section 6.2.

## 6.1. Defining an adult educator

This section will present the views or definitions of adult educators as offered by prospective adult educators in the four countries. These will be further discussed and compared in section 6.3.

## Denmark

First, it should be noted that all interviewees from Denmark had practical experiences in teaching adults, although it was not always evident how different factors, i.e. lived educational experiences, a discourse informing current specialised studies, have influenced interviewees' views of an adult educator. This being said, what is characteristic of how the Danish interviewees defined an adult educator could be summarised as follows (Milana & Larson, 2010).

Primarily, the adult educator was portrayed as a person who possesses knowledge of human nature. What that meant for each of the prospective adult educators may differ, but it is interpreted as having a capacity of understanding others. An adult educator was also described as someone having the capacity to value the learners' experiences and give respect, recognition and appreciation to such experiences. A typical adult educator was also defined as having specific personal characteristics: it is a person who is flexible, open, engaged and empathic, who creates a "*favourable learning atmosphere and supports positive relations with and between learners*" (cited in *ibid.*, p. 30). It was highlighted that the adult educator should also consider the level of knowledge by the adult learners. When it comes to the actual acting of the adult educator, the capacity of adapting one's teaching to different learning styles, which means to have an ability to vary teaching, was deemed as important. This could be summarised as the competence of keeping learners involved and interested during educational processes.

## Estonia

In the results from Estonia (Jõgi & Gross, 2010), the focus in the definition of an adult educator was on the interviewees themselves, as adult educators. They characterised themselves as being on their way to becoming adult educators. They were not yet adult educators, as some knowledge and theory was still missing. Interviewees were either young students without prior experiences of teaching/being adult educators or had prior experiences from other working fields, and had thereafter entered into the field of adult education; hence, they were on their way to becoming professional adult educators.

Concerning teaching and promoting learning in the role of adult educator, the following themes were emphasised: learner-centeredness, respecting and valuing learners, openness, and a focus on group work. The interactive learning method was mentioned as part of the practise of an adult educator. Some interviewees presented a definition of the self as an adult educator in response to this theme, and describe themselves with descriptors such as open, independent, smart, critical, responsible, helpful, and determined. One expressed: "*An educator has to have a spark and inner burning*" (cited in *ibid.*, p. 34).

It could also be noted that some of the Estonian interviewees related their definition of an adult educator to what is defined in the formal qualification standards that are used in this country (cf. *ibid.*, p. 17).

## Italy

When it comes to definitions made by the Italian interviewees it is important to bear in mind that it is those with experiences from adult education who had a clearer idea of who the adult educator is. This should be compared to the views of younger students who lack such experiences and even expressed this as an uncertainty: *“In my university area, the adult educator is something mysterious, enigmatic which ultimately no one knows what this person does...”* (cited in Farinelli, 2010, p. 37).

A central theme in the results from Italy (Farinelli, 2010) is the idea that adult education is an opportunity for everyone, a situation that has influence on the identity of the adult educator. The adult educator is seen as someone who is working for change in adults' lives. To be an adult educator is seen as a social commitment, as adult education is a tool for active citizenship. What was also particularly emphasised in the Italian results is that there is both a social and a pedagogical dimension in the role of adult educator. The adult educator *“must be a great communicator, a good psychologist, and know how to involve the student totally...”* (cited in *ibid.*, p. 38).

In addition to these dimensions, there is even an ethical dimension, which was mentioned in relation to the voluntary adult educator – it could be seen as one's 'civic duty' to become an adult educator. What was also put forward in the Italian ideas regarding the adult educator is the character of reciprocity in the learning process – the educator is learning as well as the participants. Finally, some essential capacities of an adult educator were highlighted: listening, entering into a relationship of empathy, and involving the students.

## Sweden

Also, the Swedish results (Andersson & Köpsén, 2010) show variations in telling the life story and defining the adult educator according to the interviewees' prior experiences. As will be seen in the next section (6.2.), Swedish interviewees defined the adult educator more extensively in relation to the differences in teaching children/youngsters and adults.

According to what defines an adult educator, firstly, there were those who saw nothing special at all in teaching adults, a view expressed among those with no prior teaching experiences. Secondly, there was a variation in focus – on the personal characteristics of the adult educator, or on how to act as an adult educator: there was not one typical descriptor for an adult educator. One aspect that was highlighted is that adult educators are different as teachers. Some thought of them as having ambitions in their role, while others viewed adult education as a retreat; that educators are 'old and tired' and have chosen adult education as an easy alternative. Another aspect mentioned was that adult educators have different experiences from life, including differing experiences as teachers in varying subjects/vocations.

The results also show a variation in the descriptions of the ways in which adult educators act as educators – a variation that has been interpreted as applying a

horizontal or a vertical relation to students. Even if there was no typical adult educator identified, there were still descriptions of the ideal adult educator. This adult educator was characterised as being open, flexible, and cooperative. He/she is willing to listen, discuss, and communicate with students, builds his or her teachings on students' experiences, and acts as a guide and a supervisor in a horizontal relation to students.

## 6.2. Defining differences in teaching adults versus youngsters/children

Here we will present perceived differences – or similarities – concerning the role of the teacher/educator in adult education as compared to teaching youngsters/children. As mentioned above, there is a difference in the richness of data from each country, which has been interpreted as related to the variation in the interviewees' prior experiences in teaching, and especially in terms of teaching youngsters/children. These results will also be discussed in section 6.3.

### Denmark

In the Danish sample, there were no first-hand experiences of teaching children, a fact that probably explains why the reflections mainly focused on teaching adults.

According to the results (Milana & Larson, 2010), a dialogical relation was deemed as important when teaching adults in order to give adult learners the opportunity to relate to their life experiences. Adults were described as being in another place in their life spans (as compared to youngsters/children) and were considered as participating voluntarily in adult education. When it comes to teaching, the view was that the same teaching methods are applied, even if adjusted, in different contexts. Finally, Danish interviewees expressed that adults are likely more responsible for their own learning processes.

### Estonia

In Estonia, all interviewees pointed out distinctive differences in teaching different age groups, even if many of them had little or no experience in teaching children. They made a clear difference between the teacher and the adult educator. In adult education, the study process was described as learner-centred and based on partnership, with the adult educator as supporter and facilitator.

However, there was still a view of an existing variation among participants/pupils in school versus those in adult education: there are both those who are interested and open, and those who are looking for the easy way out. Consequently, it was deemed that knowledge must be interestingly presented in order to reach all participants and not only the interested groups. Another view that emerged from the Estonian results is that adults' experiences could be both an ad-

vantage and a disadvantage in teaching. Experiences are a potential to build upon, but they could also make the adult participants less open. Children, on the other hand, were seen as ‘pure’; they are open to the new and unknown as they lack limiting experiences. However, interviewees still expressed a belief that adults are internally motivated, and that teaching adults is therefore easier. Teaching children was characterised by the fact that school is compulsory and typified by external motivation (Jōgi & Gross, 2010).

## Italy

As mentioned in section 6.1., the young Italian interviewees lacked teaching experience and therefore found it difficult to define the adult educator and discuss the differences of teaching adults versus children/youngsters. Nonetheless, interviewees with prior experiences expressed some reflections.

Although having no teaching experiences, Italian interviewees mentioned that a capacity for listening, entering into a relationship of empathy and involving the students are important for teaching adults (Farinelli, 2010). According to interviewees with teaching experience, a different picture stood out. Here, the problems associated with teaching adults were emphasised, as compared to the view that teaching children is an easier task, “*because children are trusting and are naturally willing to change, while with adults you need to be able to dismantle the superstructures*” (cited in *ibid.*, p. 39). Accordingly, the following competences were said to be essential:

- *“Being able to put oneself out on the line*
- *Being able to feel empathy for the students*
- *Being able to create a special atmosphere in class and use it for learning purposes*
- *Having a mastery of specific knowledge about the subjects being taught*
- *Knowing how to use particular techniques*
- *Having strong motivation because educating is not just a job”* (*ibid.*, p. 39).

## Sweden

Concerning Sweden, we should be reminded that teacher education for formal (general and vocational) adult education is the same as that for upper secondary school. As a result, a number of the interviewees were expected to become teachers for youngsters as well as for adults, and among interviewees with prior teaching experience, several had been teaching both adults and children/youngsters. This has been interpreted as having influenced Swedish interviewees in giving rich data of reflections and opinions on this theme. In the Swedish interviews, there were two main categories that emerged under this theme, which differ in prominence and richness according to prior experiences of teaching (Andersson & Köpsén, 2010).

The first category concerns the characteristics of adults and youngsters. These were partly understood in terms of developmental theories, partly in terms of ex-

ternal circumstances. Adults were seen as – concerning development – experienced and having patience. They were deemed to study voluntarily and have a focus on the usefulness of course contents. However, circumstances could mean that adults could be forced to participate in adult education, e.g. in a situation of unemployment, and that there is often an external, economic motivation for studying, which is also juxtaposed by less ambition in relation to the course. Youngsters, on the other hand, were described as being less experienced and very much focused on their own development and socialisation. Their participation was not viewed as a voluntary one, differing from adults' participation: everyone is expected to study in upper secondary school, even if it is not compulsory. Youngsters were deemed as often having a shorter perspective on their studies and thoughts about life. But circumstances could also mean that young pupils could be ambitious in their studies, not only because of a deep interest but also because of the external motivation for those who want high grades.

The second category concerns differences in teaching, and here we can see in more detail how the perceived differences in characteristics were experienced and in turn, considered as influencing the teaching. The situation of young pupils means that a teacher has to contribute to their upbringing. The generally lower motivation of young pupils, coupled with their less extensive experience, means that there are special demands placed on teachers. Adults, on the other hand, were considered as having a focus on the usefulness of studies and knowledge, which could also translate into higher demands being placed on teachers, e.g. prospective vocational teachers mentioned this expectation as provisioning from adults. However, adults were also seen as more experienced and their experiences were seen as useful resources in teaching. More particularly, unqualified teachers reflected on this condition for teaching. Adults were also considered as having less social problems, which was considered as resulting in lower demands on teachers.

As we can see, the pupils'/students' development, motivation and experiences encompass the main aspects in ideas about differences or similarities in teaching adults versus youngsters and children. How these are seen to influence the teaching and what it means to teach teenagers and adults varied among interviewees. Special circumstances for adult studies are in some ways known and were reflected upon mainly by the unqualified teachers in the Swedish sample. Personal experiences from teaching seem to have had an impact on the consciousness of differences of teaching and learning related to youngsters and adults, although the points of view varied (Andersson & Köpsén, 2010).

### **6.3. Discussion**

This section is a cross-country analysis where similarities and differences between countries are pointed out using the theoretical concepts of professionalism, professionalisation and professional development presented in chapter 1. These results

provide a broad picture as the basis for a discussion on views of the adult educator. First, we can identify a variation in the types or characteristics of adult educators that are in focus in the results. One aspect is that the interviewees expressed a view of how the ideal adult educator should be. Here, the views were rather homogeneous, but depending on interviewees' backgrounds, points of emphasis varied. A second aspect is that some interviewees described the variation in characteristics of the actual, experienced, adult educator, for example the 'ambitious' as compared to the 'old and tired' adult educator. A third aspect is that some of the answers put focus on the self as the adult educator-to-be.

Interviewees were adult educators-to-be, at least in terms of being on their way to acquiring the formal qualifications that are more or less necessary. Therefore, we could not expect that they would have expressed ideas of the adult educator that reflects the characteristics defining a professional. However, it is interesting to see to what extent their views could be interpreted as essentially reflecting these characteristics. Even if the results varied in terms of expressions of an 'ideal' adult educator, the 'actual' adult educator, as seen in real life, or the 'self' as an adult educator-to-be, they could be understood as expressions of the professional development of interviewees. As some of them were actually practising as adult educators, even if lacking the formal qualifications (at the time), the results could to some extent also be seen as reflecting their professionalisation.

### **Professional development and prior teaching experiences**

The results presented in this chapter reflect a variation in professional development. Some interviewees have prior experiences from adult education, or from other types of teaching, while others have less experiences of this kind. This variation is reflected in what the interviewees emphasised, as well as in how developed their views and reflections were. Their prior experiences are important in terms of professional development, for those who had such experiences. Therefore, a central question concerns to what extent the professionalisation of the adult educator is or should mainly be a matter of formal education and qualifications, and to what extent it could be a matter of a process that starts in practical experiences.

The professional identity of an adult educator may be described and understood in several ways, stressing different aspects (cf. section 1.2.). Since Estonia is the only country studied that has formal qualification standards, not surprisingly, Estonian interviewees related to these standards and to the studies aiming to this formal competence, when defining the adult educator. The prospective adult educators from Denmark, Italy and Sweden primarily rooted their definitions in personal experiences or their visions of what the future work will be like.

According to the specialised body of knowledge of a professional adult educator, Danish interviewees talked about having knowledge of human nature, meaning having the capacity to understand others and having the competence to keep learners involved and interested in the educational process. Also, the Italian prospective

adult educators talked about the necessity to know how to involve students and mentioned the need to have an adult educator as a great communicator and a good psychologist. Among the Swedish interviewees, there were those having the opinion that there are no special demands on knowledge for adult educators as there is nothing special in teaching adults. Those having this opinion had no teaching experience. Others having had experience in teaching adults expressed that adult educators should necessarily have different experiences in life. This is a point of view only mentioned by Swedish interviewees.

Teaching, being a central aspect of the role of an adult educator, was described by the Danish prospective adult educators as creating a favourable learning atmosphere and supporting positive relations with and between learners. It was also mentioned that an adult educator should also have the capacity to adapt teaching to different learning needs and styles, while variation in teaching was seen as important. The Swedish prospective adult educators reflected on the different kinds of relations in terms of what could be described as horizontal or vertical relations to students. The Estonian prospective adult educators emphasised the learner-centeredness and the focus of group work, which were not mentioned by interviewees from the other countries.

The part of the professional identity of an adult educator related to values and personal understandings was highlighted by the Italian interviewees who viewed the adult educator as someone working for the change in adults' lives. It was expressed that being an adult educator is a social commitment. Some of the Swedish interviewees talked about the adult educator acting as a guide and a supervisor more than a teacher. Both the Danish and the Swedish interviewees expressed desirable personal characteristics in terms of being open, flexible, engaged and empathic. Valuing and giving respect to the learners' experiences was also seen as an important attitude of an adult educator. The Italian interviewees also mentioned the importance of having the capacities of listening and being empathic. The Estonian interviewees pointed to similar values and personal understandings, but mentioned helpful, independent, critical, and determined as desirable personal characteristics.

### **Perspectives on participants – development, motivation, life experiences**

We can see that to a large extent there were limited or no experiences from, and ideas about, teaching children/youngsters in our sample. Most exceptions were present among the Swedish interviewees, where the teacher education for formal education is the same for youngsters and adults. It should also be noted that the ideas of teaching children/youngsters, which were used in the interviews for comparison and clarification on the ideas of teaching adults, are to some extent, particularly provisioning from those lacking school teaching experiences, and as a result, are probably based on personal experiences as school pupils. For example, the Estonian interviewees had a clear view of the difference between teachers and adult educators, even if they had limited experiences in teaching children themselves. In

Italy, one interviewee pointed out important characteristics of the adult educator, or competences deemed necessary in adult education (see quotation in section 6.2.). But why are such competences not reflected upon as valuable also in school? It could be that they are useful and valuable, if not necessary, also in school, in teaching children. Such definitions probably build upon tradition and taken-for-granted ideas of how school and teaching children 'are'.

An important factor in teaching is seen to be participants' experiences, which could be understood as a resource or a problem. In the results from Denmark, relating to participants' experiences was described as important. In the Estonian interviews, experiences were partly considered as a resource, but also as a restriction. The restriction was described as experiences making adults less open to development and change, as compared to experiences with 'pure' children. In Italy, the focus was rather on the challenge inherent in teaching adults, where adult educators were deemed as having to 'dismantle the superstructures' that could be understood as related to adults' life experiences – this was distinguished from the perception that it is a relatively easy task to teach children that are 'willing to change'. In contrast, Swedish interviewees generally considered experiences as a useful resource in teaching. The development of such various ideas could be understood as an example of the variation in professional development in different contexts.

The different position in the life span of youngsters versus adults, and therefore the differences in terms of experiences, was mainly developed in the Swedish results. Here, adults were described as experienced, as voluntarily studying, and as having a focus on the usefulness of studies, which translate into high expectations and demands on teachers. But, on the other hand, there are also other adult students that were described as forced to study, thus being less internally motivated, which also puts special requirements on adult teachers. Youngsters were generally seen as less experienced. Studying is a compulsory task for them, at least in practice, which translated into the perception that teaching occurs in a situation of less internal motivation among youngsters. According to the Swedish interviewees, there are also more social problems among youngsters, and teaching therefore requires a dimension of 'up-bringing'. But there are ambitious youngsters too, which was partly explained by the external motivation of grades, etc. that are important for their future.

Thus, there is a complex picture that emerged from the Swedish results concerning the role of internal/external motivation, and whether adult students are genuinely interested or not. This might be explained by an adult education system that has a role in the labour market and unemployment policy, and opportunities of e.g. study subsidies. In Denmark, it seems to be more evident that participation in adult education is understood as voluntary by prospective adult educators, which makes the role of the adult educator less complex. In Estonia, adults are generally perceived as being internally motivated, as compared to compulsory school, where students are deemed as being more externally motivated. However, there are those

who are looking for the easy way out among adults as well as among younger pupils.

There is also a variation in the views of whether teaching adults is totally different from teaching children, or if the differences are more a question of degree and slighter adaptations. The most outstanding difference is seen between Denmark and Estonia. In the Danish results, the idea was expressed that teachers apply the same methods, but adapt to the age group. On the other hand, even if their experiences from teaching children are limited, the interviewees in Estonia emphasised the outstanding difference between a teacher (of children) and an adult educator who has the role as supporter and facilitator. Thus, interviewees' views of what/who an adult educator is differed significantly, depending on if they had had practical experiences, or if their views were mainly based on theoretical studies and personal experiences as a school pupils. Those who had teaching experiences had views related to the educational context and the target group, while those less experienced were more focused on the personal characteristics of the adult educator. Depending on the pathways or experiences, the ideas of teaching adults and children/youngsters vary. For example, adult students described as neither motivated nor interested is a theme that is only highlighted from the Swedish sample. The prospective adult educators had seen this through their own experiences as acting adult educators, while those without such experiences did not have this idea of a 'problematic' target group. The fact that this theme emerged from the Swedish context indicates that it is situated in a national context where adult education is not only a matter of voluntary participation based on internal motivation, but could also be a means to reducing unemployment and a means for students to get money through study subsidies. In other countries, on the other hand, other problems with teaching adults were highlighted – for example, that the background and pre-understandings of adult students are seen as problematic, as compared to a view that experiences are valuable and a resource when teaching.

### **Professionalism and social commitment among adult educators**

Finally, the idea of social commitment, particularly highlighted in the Italian results, is interesting in relation to the idea of professionalism. On the one hand, social commitment could be seen as connected to voluntary work and efforts beyond what are the primary tasks of an educator. On the other hand, professionalism also requires a commitment in relation to the aim of work. Therefore, the adult educator's work aim could and should be discussed. There is most likely not one answer, valid in all sectors and all national/regional contexts. When adult education is part of a formal educational system, with national curricula, etc., there is probably more focus on commitment in relation to the theoretical or vocational subjects that are taught. But when adult education is non-formal and part of the third sector, there would be more focus on the social commitment of the educator. However, these stereotypes are also blurred, when the variation in background and commitment

among the actual group of participants/students makes it necessary to adapt the educational work to their needs. In some groups of participants, a social commitment is necessary for being a successful adult educator, even if this is not a formal or official policy and requirement.

## Chapter 7: Concluding remarks

By Marcella Milana

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Adult education has historically played a unique role in facilitating citizens' participation in different spheres of life; hence, it has been conceptualised as a means for social change and for economic and human resource development. The importance of adult education today is not diminished but rather reinforced by the high degree of complexity that characterises globalised modern societies. These processes challenge traditional notions of citizenry, development and the state and, by extension, their relations to adult education. This synthesis report focused on the professionalisation of current and prospective adult educators, who represent important agents for adult education in addressing contemporary challenges.

Drawing on research activity that was carried out in four European countries, somewhat representative of its Northern, Southern and Eastern division, the report informs policymakers, researchers and practitioners on the current status of professionalisation pathways in a sensitive area of educational concern, and calls them to take new steps towards improving professionalism, especially among potential adult educators for whom specialised studies in the field are restricted – if not absent – or who may not consider entering a professional career in this field, due to its relatively low socio-economic status. Further, the report also calls them to improve the conditions for current adult educators willing to progress in their careers, but experiencing difficulties in getting their competences and qualification valued, and rights fully recognised and protected at work.

The empirical evidence compiled for this report, presented and discussed in chapters 2-6, highlights the diverse institutional outlooks of the adult education provisions in the countries under investigation. They hold distinctive characterisations of the roles and responsibilities by the public and private sectors, but demonstrate a general growing interest in vocationally-oriented adult education and on-the-job training and, to a minor extent, an interest in the cultural and social integration of immigrants, dyslectics and mentally disabled. The empirical evidence underscores, however, the blurred boundaries that exist between adult educators and other professionals in education, when it comes to the identification, recognition and regulation of the profession, with the sole exception of Estonia, where a Professional Qualification Standard for adult educators has been in place since 2004. This results in uneven employment conditions, social protection and professional representation among adult educators working in the field of general, vocationally-oriented and liberal adult education within and between countries. The empirical evidence also shows that few employment requirements specifically address specialised competences and adult education qualification in relation to work in this field, though a number of options exist for those willing to develop further qualifications

in educating adults. In all countries, opportunities for further specialised studies range from short courses at a basic level of just a few weeks' duration to full programmes at the bachelor and master levels, mostly run by universities and other higher education institutions, but also by liberal adult education providers and professional associations. The fact that most of the options do not pertain to the mainstream education system, however, provides substance to the claim that entering a career as adult educator is implicitly considered a possibility for those who have accumulated a number of years of working experience rather than for young people who have not yet entered the labour market, with the only exception of Italy. Further, the empirical evidence brought together in this report shows a strong political focus on labour market needs and relevance, when it comes to adult education provisions, contrasted by scarce attention paid to the role played by adult educators and their qualifications in supporting learning processes among the adult population. It also underscores the challenges of entering a career as an adult educator and several shortcuts or turning points in personal and professional lives leading current and prospective adult educators to enter specialised studies, often as a result of both individual motives and external demands. Institutional changes and labour market structural conditions influence an individual's self perceptions and configurations of the professional contexts in which current and prospective adult educators perform. Better social recognition and acceptance at work, together with the hope for increasing professional influence and contributing to social change through one's profession, not least by means of continuing education and training, characterise not only self-perceptions but also individual predictions for future career development. Distinguishable features of an adult educator as a professional are not always easily identifiable and often result in a mix between idealised images, characteristics observed in others acting as adult educators, and perceptions of the self in real life work contexts. Consequently, a professional identity is differently characterised by personal values and understandings that vary across countries and cultures, as do current and prospective adult educators' perspectives on adult learners, their individual and professional development, motivation to engage in teaching-learning transactions and the role of prior life experience in supporting or hampering new learning.

Summing up, the report argues that while the quality of adult education represents a topic of concern at European and national levels, difficulties embedded in the provision of qualified teaching-learning transactions by adult educators, who often enter the profession without specialised pedagogical knowledge, are often underestimated. Further, it also argues that professionalism in the field of adult education embodies contrasting views and understandings of its purpose, characterisations and possibilities, not least due to weak social recognition, fragile collective representativeness and individual protection.

We hope that more in-depth studies on the interplay between individual and structural conditions that affect professionalisation processes among current and prospective adult educators in other European countries, which present diverse

socio-economic and political features, will be given priority in comparative education research agendas for the future. Special attention should be given, in our opinion, to investigate ways in which national, regional and local policies support or hamper the structuring of initial and continuing education and training of adult educators, and how participation in existing and new specialised studies and/or in concrete or virtual professional communities impacts professionalism in the field.

When the BAEA team planned to carry out the project, not many publications were discussing professionalism in the field of adult education. Immanent to the publication of this report, however, new steps have been undertaken. Three conferences, hosted by the German Institute for Adult Education (Germany), the University of Macedonia (Greece) and Malmö University (Sweden), gathered researchers and practitioners from within and outside Europe to share research results and experiences from practice. Further, a contribution to the development of a reference framework of key competences for adult learning professionals has recently been published and made widely accessible by the European Commission (Buischool et al., 2010). Although a few members of the BAEA team have expressed some reservations on the full applicability of a reference framework, discussing its development has contributed to a vivid debate on the future of this profession. This and other initiatives that contribute to increasing research-based knowledge on the professional status of adult education as well as on professionalism are much needed for the advancement of policy, research and practices in this field. With sufficient political attention, renewed commitment by researchers and adequate resources, better conditions for the professionalisation of current and prospective adult educators can be created, and the quality of adult education provisions improved.

# Policy recommendations

By Fiorella Farinelli

From the BAEA study emerges a clear difference in all countries under investigation between adult education policies, i.e. characterised by increased attention being paid to the quality of learning outcomes, also with reference to the new and urgent needs of the labour market, and to the problems of cultural integration and social cohesion related with immigration, and policies dealing with the professionalisation of adult educators. Although in some countries, e.g. Estonia and Sweden, there are innovative legislative procedures that can develop in an interesting way, and in all countries new and important experiences in the field of general, vocational and liberal adult education are currently ongoing, the problem of the initial and in-service training of adult educators, their recruitment, their employment conditions, their union and professional representativeness, and therefore of their social recognition, is still open. This is also the case in Estonia, where a professional profile of the adult educator has been identified and recognised at the national level.

This state of the art presents some critical aspects, which were widely exposed in the national reports (Andersson & Köpsén, 2010; Farinelli, 2010; Jögi & Gross, 2010; Milana & Larson, 2010) and shortly addressed here, with reference, on the one hand, to the quality of the results of adult education, and therefore to its attractiveness for adults, and, on the other hand, to the necessity, underlined at the European level (EC, 2006; EC, 2007a, 2007b), to support professional and training mobility of adults in general, including adult education professionals. Within this framework, the policy recommendations which can be formulated by the BAEA team solicit also a new initiative by the European Commission.

- The European Commission should call member states to develop finalised policies: (i) to define initial training paths of high level that can ensure prospective adult educators to develop either cultural-methodological competences or specific theoretical and professional competences necessary for teaching adults, and (ii) to provide appropriate support for further career development by means of effective continuing training, which shall be connected with concrete and diverse working contexts. This could include the setting up of professional communities that promote the exchange of experiences and best practices as well as self-training opportunities. It is important, however, that any European initiative in this direction take into account the indications that have emerged from existing experiences and practices; hence, that recognises a specific professional profile and identity for adult educators that connects and distinguishes this professional category to/from others. Further, it should contribute to define positively the multiple-identity

of a professional figure that integrates in its activities, different functions for the cultural and professional development of groups of adults, who are diversified by social and cultural backgrounds, by motivations and training needs, and by expectations and objectives. This multiple-identity should be interpreted as an added-value, rather than perceived as uncertain, approximate and generic, with the consequent unattractiveness of this profession for young people.

- Governments should contribute to the development of an institutional and social culture capable of identifying adult educators as a professional group with complex cultural and professional competences for the recognition of adults' learning needs, the valorisation of their previous competences, and the promotion of cultural and professional development as conditions towards improving employability and active citizenship.
- Institutional actors involved in the promotion and management of adult education should recognise that the quality of its results depends mainly on the professional quality of its teachers. This depends, to a certain extent, on employment-entry criteria, and should be recognised in economic and working terms and supported by effective continuing training.
- Training bodies and agencies operating in the field of adult education should demonstrate the possession of specific professional competences through its teachers, to be recognised as accredited providers.

Further:

- Adult education should be included among formally recognised professions at national and European levels.
- Professional qualification standards for adult educators should be easily understood by applicants and providers.
- Initial and continuing education and training of adult educators should be structured properly in order to attract young people to orient themselves towards this career from the upper secondary and tertiary school levels.
- New opportunities for participation in specialised studies and concrete or virtual communities for professional exchanges and mutual enrichment should be created, especially in favour of those working in the field of adult education but lacking formal professional competences. Both are fundamental factors for the creation of a strong professional identity and a sense of belonging to the professional category.
- Universities should play an important role in the design of curricula that are capable of including the different competences characterising the adult educator's professional profile, in terms of theory and training in the field. It seems particularly relevant that universities organise clearly defined and func-

tional internships to develop the necessary competences for carrying out concrete functions in the different spheres of adult education and learning.

- Job rules and agreements among social parts in the realm of adult education, i.e. including liberal adult education, should recognise the professional profile of adult educators, the necessity of specific formal, cultural and professional requisites for recruitment, the right and duty of adult educators to in-service continuing training, as well as the same working conditions and treatment as those applied to other professions in education.

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This report presents the results from a comparative study, *Becoming Adult Educators in the European Area (BAEA)*, aimed at investigating how prospective adult educators qualify for their jobs before entering the profession. The empirical evidence gathered in four European countries (i.e. Denmark, Estonia, Italy and Sweden) shows a strong political focus on labour market needs and relevance, when it comes to adult education provisions. This is paralleled by scarce attention paid to the role played by adult educators and their qualifications in supporting learning processes among the adult population. It also calls attention to the challenges of entering a career as adult educator and reveals several shortcuts or turning points in personal and professional lives that lead current and prospective adult educators to undertake specialised studies in adult education; these are often the result of both individual motives and external demands. Drawing on this evidence, the report informs policymakers, researchers and practitioners on the current status of professionalisation pathways in a sensitive area of educational concern and calls them to take new steps towards improving professionalism, especially among potential adult educators for whom specialised studies in the field are restricted – if not absent – or who may not consider entering a professional career in this field, due to its relatively low socio-economic status. It also calls policymakers, researchers and practitioners to improve the conditions for current adult educators who are willing to progress in their careers, but experiencing difficulties in getting their competencies and qualification valued and rights fully recognised and protected at work.