IRC-GloCoPoS
International Research Centre on
Global and Comparative Policy Studies on the Education and Learning of Adults

Research Agenda
(2017-2019)

Background

The overall objectives of the IRC-GloCoPos, as by its constitutive Statute (Art.2), are to advance scientific knowledge and to promote knowledge exchange and dissemination in three interrelated areas:

1. Comparative policy studies: Research by the Centre will interrogate: How is policy on the education and learning of adults made under the effects of globalization and increased internationalization in education?

2. Global policy studies: Research by the Centre will question: Who and what contribute to policy developments on the education and learning of adults across socio-political territories? How do these policy developments affect adult education and learning praxis in specific localities?

3. Theory and methods: Research by the Centre will explore: What theories, concepts, research methods and strategies can be fruitfully applied to advance comparative and global policy studies on the education and learning of adults?

As by it constitutive Statute (Art. 4), the full range of activities through which the Centre is to achieve its objectives include:

a) Carry out studies and investigations;

b) Organize scientific conferences;

c) Promote the production of scientific books and publications;

d) Organize courses and seminars for undergraduate and graduate;

e) Facilitate visiting exchanges of academic staff, including PhD students, across the institutions adhering to the Centre;

f) Promote the dialogue with individuals, professionals and non-academic institutions from local, national and international communities.

This document: (1) presents the state of the art in global and comparative studies on adult education, (2) identifies the research objectives, and related line of research that will be given priority over a 3-year period (2017-2019), and (3) specifies the activities carried out over this period.

1. State of the art

In the field of policy research on the education and learning of adults, studies that focus on policy developments at global scale (and their relation to national developments), as well as comparative investigations of policy in different countries, represent a fairly intelligible (though not necessarily cohesive) body of work that share three characteristics (Milana, in print):

1. An interest on political decisions that affects adult education and learning;
2. An understanding that the demand and supply of adult education and learning opportunities is not independent from public policies (including the lack of them); and
3. A consideration for different systems of politics and governance as bringing about transformations in adult education and learning opportunities.

A meta-investigation (Mainardes & Tello, 2016; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007) of the literature highlights four distinctive research patterns that serve as indicators for reflecting on the research under consideration, and for stressing current gaps and future research needs (Milana, in print).

Pattern 1: Describing changes and evolutions along a temporal continuum - Historical accounts depict the evolutions in the thinking of the societal role of adult education and learning, and its related practices, by the 'big actors' in education governance, like the World Bank, UNESCO, the OECD and the EU (see for instance: Jacobi, 2009; Lee & Jan, in print). Pattern 1 has brought to light the embedded tensions between what – in general terms – can be called "education for productivity" and "education for personal" development (Holford & Mohorčič Špolar, 2012). In short, it has helped increasing our understandings of external factors that impact on normative, administrative and financial changes in the provision of adult education and learning opportunities in different localities. But it has paid only a limited attention to internal, country-specific factors that also affect such provision.

Pattern 2: Comparing (horizontally) policies by different actors (e.g., national and local governments, international organizations), either at a certain point in time or from an historical perspective – These studies use geographical and / or geopolitical lenses and focus attention on the complexity of national or international policy, and their practical implications for adult education and learning (see for instance: Storan, 2010). Often, they look at ' big actors', examine changes in the governance of adult education and learning, assess the working of specific policy tools, and debate the possible implications for adult education and learning practices (see for instance: Lee, Tryggvi & Na'im 2008; Panitsides, 2015; Rubenson, 2015; Németh, 2015; Easton & Samples, 2015; Tuckett, 2015; Milana, 2012). Pattern 2 has helped increasing our understandings of the complexity of global governance in adult education, and the interplay between local-global dynamics. But it has likewise overlooked the potentials for deeper investigations of within-country power relations between levels of government and between state, market and civil society.

Pattern 3: Juxtaposing (vertically) policies by intergovernmental organisations with those of their member states, and assessing convergence / divergence - For the most, these studies recognise that documents the intergovernmental organisations produce, activities they coordinate (e.g., international conferences) or requests and inputs they address to member states are dynamic elements that contribute to the governance of adult education (see for instance: Milana, 2015, 2016; Rubenson & Nesbit, 2011). At times the studies focus on a political notion introduced and/or sustained by

international organizations and investigate how it concretises within specific national contexts (see for instance: Plant & Turner, 2005; Pohl & Walther, 2007; Cavaco, Lafont & Pariat, 2014; Papastamatis & Panitsidou 2009). Pattern 3 has contributed new knowledge on the raising (and fall) of specific notions that feed into the thinking about adult education and learning (cf. pattern 1), and their concretisations in terms of new educational models, services or provisions. Moreover, it highlighted the impact that global policy-relevant events have had or may have at either national or regional scales. But this pattern has not yet explored the potentials of 'reverted' vertical comparisons (from country to international level) that may illuminate whether, and to what extent, local and national systems of governance may influence the working of supranational systems, or exploit policy-relevant events with a global reach for internal political gains, etc.

Pattern 4: Questioning and providing counter-evidence for widespread political beliefs – This pattern collates contributions – for the most think pieces or discussion papers – that do not derive from direct empirical work but draw on available body of facts or information, in particular as counter-evidence to prevalent political beliefs. For instance, Ahmed (2010) questions the idea that lifelong learning will contrast the effects of the 2009 global financial crisis, or Preece (2009) criticises that lifelong learning promotes the development of countries, independently from their geopolitical positioning in the world system. In short, pattern 4 has helped to preserve a space for subverting the viewpoints on adult education and learning policy, by provoking new questions that are worth further research attention.

2. Research objectives, and areas of research

The examination of the literature shows that very little research has investigated adult education and learning policy following at the same time both the comparative (horizontal) and the vertical (global / national / local) dimensions, although examples of such research can be found (see, for instance Milana, 2017). It will be a core ambition of the Centre (and its affiliates) to begin filling this gap by:

- ✓ Combining vertical and horizontal perspectives that connects what available research treats as separate objects of investigation;
- ✓ Paying attention to, and teasing out, existing connections between and across socio-political scales;
- ✓ Looking at the interconnections between international and within-country power relations in adult education and learning policy;
- ✓ Including 'reverted' vertical comparisons using sample countries that are members of major international organizations (e.g. EU, OECD, UNESCO);
- ✓ Exploring whether, and if so to what extent, local, national, regional and international systems of governance influence the working of other systems.

As the research agenda of the Centre includes processes, institutions and structures at different levels re, it will also include interconnections between policy and many different forms of educational practice, such as teaching and leading in adult education institutions, managing workplace learning, supervising adults and accrediting their skills from prior learning. The Centre will take an interest in

how policy influences educational practice and how inputs from education practice are influence policy.

The above research objectives will be achieved by combining the following lines of research:

Line 1: European governance in adult education and learning investigates the ways European governance enables coordination of numerous initiatives taken by a large number of actors, through which governance mechanisms and, to which effects.

Europeanization addresses an all-encompassing process of "*domestic adaptation* to *European regional integration*" (Graziano & Vink, 2008, p. 7, emphasis in original). Early 'top-down' studies of domestic *implementation* have being slowly replaced by a 'bottom-up-down' study of domestic *adaptation* that, starting from the domestic level, investigates what contributes to the formation of institutions and policies at European level, which sort direct and indirect effects exerting pressure on single countries towards European regional integration.

Line 2: International organisations and the shaping of global adult education and learning investigates the role and impact of international organizations with an interest in education in the shaping of global policy targeting the adult population.

International organizations affect the shaping of adult education and learning policy in different ways, for instance through the implementation of regulatory frameworks and international agendas, as well as through complex new infrastructures that have been developed as the result of joint efforts by national governments and international organizations. Prominent among these are the role data, benchmarks, indicators and algorithms, in developing harmonisation across countries in the collection and interpretation of data on education systems and their outputs, as well as on people's skills.

Line 3: Policy framings and developments in countries, organizations, and other contexts investigates how policies are shaped, signified and enacted by a constellation of different actors in specific contexts, and under certain constrains.

Adult education policy develops in many different contexts and forms, for instance as adult education and learning policy in an single national context and in a specific period, positioning in adult education policy of certain national or transnational organisations (in a broad sense, also including less formalised but connected groups of actors) or even individual educationalists and the policy consequences of their ideas and work. Work under this line of research will still draw on the broader analytical framework pursued by the centre.

Line 4: Transformations in adult education and learning policy investigates policy changes both within and across geo-political borders, social territories, and their cultures, by application and refinement of a pioneering heuristic model for studying transformations in adult education and learning (Milana, 2017), in order to move beyond a dichotomization between internal (national) vs. external (international) policy changes.

The above model has been sketched from the literature, and further developed through field studies, drawing on political science (and international relations) to acknowledge an expanded polity or setting for public policy in adult education, however comprised of a nested system of governments at different

scales. Moreover, the model also drew on comparative education and anthropology to identify the constitutive categories of this expanded polity structure, thus relating it with policy and norms and ideas about adult education across and between scales. It has been applied to study mobilization process that happen through and via the UNESCO (Milana, 2016) and for comparing recent developments in adult basic and secondary education in North America, South America and Europe (Milana, 2017).

3. Activity (last updated: June 2018)

1) Organising the centre
- Established a website, based at the University of Verona and linked with the other institutions

2) Externally funded project

Line 1: European governance in adult education and learning

- "ENLIVEN" (H2020)

Line 2: International organisations and the shaping of global adult education and learning & Line 3: Transformations in adult education and learning policy

Line 3: Policy framings and developments in countries, organizations, and other contexts

Line 4: Transformations in adult education and learning policy

3) Scientific conferences

2017: Hosting of the III International Conference of the ESREA Research Network in Policy Studies on Adult Education: "Equity, Social Justice and Adult Education and Learning Policy", June 8-10, Verona.

5) Courses and seminars for undergraduate and graduate students

2017: Winter School for postgraduate students on "International perspectives on education policy: theories and methods", October 16-20, Verona.

2018: Winter School for postgraduate students on "International perspectives on education policy: theories and methods", November 11-16, Verona.