

Comparing Professionalisation in Adult and Continuing Education

Vanna Boffo, Kathrin Kaleja, Khulud Sharif-Ali
& Joana Fernandes

The curriculum of study programmes for adult educators – the study cases of Italy, Germany and Portugal¹

Abstract

In this comparative case study, the authors take two different types of perspectives into account: one perspective centres on the competences associated with adult education trainers; the second perspective focuses on an approach to the trainers' curriculum in adult education, regarding their differences and similarities. The body of European research on competences is large. After more than ten years of studies and projects, we have some common frameworks and precise directions. In particular, the path lead by Knowles (1997) in the 1970s marked an important aspect: the adult educator is not a teacher but a guide and facilitator, both in a formal learning context and in an informal or non-formal situation. From a curriculum point of view, we can identify a German and an Italian effort in building up a common core curriculum in adult education, which includes contents and ECTS perspectives. In Portugal, the trainer's profile and curriculum have evolved a lot: he/she is no longer just someone who has the pedagogical ability to communicate a certain type of knowledge and evaluate learning outcomes but an inspiring and creative guide. The comparison further shows a similar perspective regarding the competences of an adult educator in the countries considered.

Introduction

The role of adult educators depend on the state and the countries from a political and a cultural point of view. The great importance of lifelong learning for the growth of each European country shows us the central importance of professionalising the adult educator.

1 The article represents the work of all authors, although Introduction, Conclusion and Part 1 are by Vanna Boffo, Part 2 is by Kathrin Kaleja, Part 3 is by Khulud Sharif-Ali, Part 4 is by Joana Fernandes.

In this sense, the types of jobs are different according to national classifications of occupation, where we have it. There are countries that have this and others that don't. In Germany, it depends very much on the flexible needs of the economy and the adult/lifelong learning contexts. In Italy and other countries, classifications include: trainer, programme planner, curriculum designer, career counsellor, manager, marketing/media/PR specialist, project manager, researcher, administrator in social firms, and the like. The role of professionals is an important part of the social economy. On one side, we have many different jobs, but on the other side, the activities are less different. The fields of activities, as agreed in the European study on the competency profile of adult educators (Buiskool, Broek, van Lakerveld, Zarifis, & Osborne, 2010, p. 35), can be differentiated as follows: 'Monitoring and evaluation, Counselling and guidance activities, Programme development activities, ICT support activities, Network activities, Administrative support activities, Marketing and Public Relations, Management of quality, Human resource management, Financial management, Need assessment, Preparation of courses, Facilitation of learning'.

The term *competence* is defined as: part of skills, part of knowledge, and part of responsibility. It is possible to divide competences into a lot of categories, for instance, generic and specific (Buiskool et al., 2010, p. 11). For example, it is possible to divide competence into personal and professional competence. It depends on the point of view of research. For a teacher or for a trainer, we can say there are three fields of competences: 1) relational and communicative competences, 2) didactical competences, and 3) disciplinary competences. In Europe these types of competence are studied and applied in the curricula of university study programmes. The article will observe the situation in three countries: Italy, Germany, and Portugal.

The Case Study of Italy

In Italy, the study programme of the adult education course is divided into two different levels: the first one is a bachelor's course named 'Sciences of Education and Formation', three years long; the second one is the master's course in 'Sciences of Adult Education and Continuing Training', two years long. This master's course was implemented in 2001, when the new policy on the length of degree programmes in higher education completely changed the face of the Italian university (Ministry for Universities and Scientific and Technological Research, 1999).

Table 1: Study Programmes in Adult Education (Source: Author's Own)

Type of Degree	Curriculum/ didactical contents	Methods	General information	Standard
Three-year bachelor's Bachelor of science in education and formation	Pedagogy and educational methodology; philosophy, psychology, sociology, and anthropology; history, geography, economics and law; education and integration of disabled people	Seminars, Laboratories, Workshops, Lessons, practical experiences/internship, final thesis	Entrance requirements: secondary school (with admission test), duration: 3 years training CFU for key competences: 180 CFU practical experiences: 300 hours	High level Evaluation quality system
Two-year degrees Master of science in adult education and continuing training or two-year degrees in pedagogical sciences	Pedagogy and educational methodology; psychology, sociology, and philosophy; law, economics, and politics	Seminars, Laboratories, Workshops, Lessons, practical experiences/internship, final thesis	Entrance requirements: Three-year bachelor's, duration: 2 years, training CFU for key competences: 120 CFU practical experiences: 100 hours	Very high level Evaluation quality system

A general description of the profile could be: The definition of professionals only includes those profiles for whom adult learning constitutes the primary or most significant source of income. Adult learning includes activities aimed at recovering educational skills also within professionalisation pathways. The main areas of adult learning are as follows:

- Adult basic education (EQF 1 and 2): In this field, most services are carried out by state schools, while some are promoted by local councils or voluntary associations (especially those which support immigrants).
- Secondary education (EQF 3): Although the majority of initiatives in this field are promoted by state schools, private institutes are also present.
- Postsecondary education (EQF 4): In this field, one-year higher education courses combine with technical educational institutes offering two-year

courses, both basically aimed at the training of skilled workers. Most initiatives in this field take place in the private sector.

Professionals working in all of the above areas are the equivalent of teachers in each of the corresponding school levels. In postsecondary education, professional technicians and trainers are also common. For this type of professionals, the labour market requires both a bachelor's and a master's degree, but a specific certificate in adult education is not necessary. In the case of formal education, the teachers are the same for children and young adolescents. There aren't any specific preparations, although, in the past year, we expected a change from a legislative point of view (Decree of the President of Republic, n. 263/2012). Because of the new rules, there will be an innovative organisation from the didactical point of view for awarding certificates of primary or secondary school to adults. In this way, it will be possible to increase the level of teaching and learning in the formal adult education system.

Another important variation is the national system for recognising prior learning at the level of the competences of an adult worker (Legislative Decree n. 13/2013). We expect that these legislative modifications will have many effects on the labour market for the adult educator job profile. Also in this case, policy changes will have an effect on adult education because it will be possible to reach a new level of reflection on learning and teaching.

The competences of a trainer are diverse; partly dependent on the labour market and partly fixed by the curriculum of the course of study. A trainer could be a tutor, a teacher of organised learning units, or an adult educator in a specific context in firms or in a private school team. The competences are: *communication skills, learning skills, making judgements, and applying transdisciplinary knowledge* (Knowles, 1973). If we focus our attention on competences as the outcomes at the end of the master's level, we can set the competences of a professional at 6–7 EQF. In this case, we can speak about a profile as teacher or manager or project manager. In Italy, there are lots of professionals in adult education, and the most important distinction is between formal and non-formal education. In the first sector, the principal figure is the teacher; in the second field, the main figures are in-company training managers, human resource managers, experts, and consultants. In every situation, the profile of an adult educator or teacher of adult people is that of a facilitator, a trainer who is very close to the students. Malcolm Knowles (1973, 1997), Carl Rogers (1980), and Donald Schön (1987) wrote in a specific way about the type of teacher in the learning situation with adult learners. At the roots of each of these scholar's thoughts was the lesson of Dewey's pedagogy (1938).

Which types of competences are at the base of the adult educator profile in Italy? As the report of Research voor Beleid (Buiskool et al., 2010) stressed, there are generic competences and specific competences. The following description of competences is a good analysis of the competences that are described in guidelines of university-level courses of study, or better building up the professionalization of the educational job with the adult it is necessary to research them. The generic competences are considered fundamental to any job in the education sector in a rapidly changing world:

- Personal competence in systematic reflection on one's own practice, learning, and personal development: **being a fully autonomous lifelong learner.**
- Interpersonal competence in communicating and collaborating with adult learners, colleagues and stakeholders: **being a communicator, team player, and networker.**
- Competence in being aware of and taking responsibility for the institutional setting in which adult learning takes place at all levels (institute, sector, the profession as such, and society): **being responsible for the further development of adult learning.**
- Competence in making use of one's own subject-related expertise and the available learning resources: **being an expert.**
- Competence in making use of different learning methods, styles, and techniques, including new media, and being aware of new possibilities and e-skills and assessing them critically: **being able to deploy different learning methods, styles, and techniques in working with adults.**
- Competence in empowering adult learners to learn and support themselves in their development into, or as, fully autonomous lifelong learners: **being a motivator.**
- Competence in dealing with group dynamics and heterogeneity in the background, learning needs, motivation, and prior experience of adult learners: **being able to deal with heterogeneity and groups** (Buiskool et al., 2010, p. 12)

Specific competences are dependent on the type of job and the role of the employer; in that sense, it would be necessary to distinguish between the specific competences linked directly to a professional as teacher, trainer, or educator on the one hand, and the competences linked to a manager or project manager on the other. In the first case, the specific competences of a specialist of the learning process are:

- Competence in assessment of prior experience, learning needs, demands, motivations, and wishes of adult learners: **being capable of assessment of adult learners' learning needs.**

- Competence in selecting appropriate learning styles, didactical methods, and content for the adult learning process: **being capable of designing the learning process.**
- Competence in facilitating the learning process for adult learners: **being a facilitator of knowledge (practical and/or theoretical) and a stimulator of adult learners' own development.**
- Competence to continuously monitor and evaluate the adult learning process in order to improve it: **being an evaluator of the learning process.**
- Competence in advising on career, life, further development and, if necessary, the use of professional help: **being an advisor/counsellor.**
- Competence in designing and constructing study programmes: **being a programme developer** (Buiskool et al., 2010, p. 13).

For managers or project managers, competences in the financial field or in human resources will be very important. In these last professional profiles, the following competences are required:

- Competence in managing financial resources and assessing the social and economic benefits of the provision: **being financially responsible.**
- Competence in managing human resources in an adult learning institute: **being a (people) manager.**
- Competence in managing and leading the adult learning institute in general and managing the quality of the provision of the adult learning institute: **being a general manager.**
- Competence in marketing and public relations: **being able to reach the target groups, and promote the institute.**
- Competence in dealing with administrative issues and informing adult learners and adult learning professionals: **being supportive in administrative issues.**
- Competence in facilitating ICT-based learning environments and supporting both adult learning professionals and adult learners in using these learning environments: **being an ICT-facilitator** (Buiskool et al., 2010, p. 13).

These types of competences are at the base of the profile of graduates of bachelor's and master's programmes in adult education in Italy. We may say the general competences are built at the bachelor's level and the specific competences, with a specialisation towards the 'expert of the learning processes' or towards the 'expert in human resources managing/project Manager', are built at the master's level.

The lists of competences reflect, over the course of academic study in Italy, the Dublin descriptors (Bologna Follow-Up Group, 2005), because these last ones serve as the basis on which the learning outcomes of the Italian first- and second-cycle

degree courses are structured. The elements of the Dublin descriptors are: 1) knowledge and understanding, 2) applying knowledge and understanding, 3) making judgements, 4) communication skills, and 5) learning skills. They are general descriptors, and they are linked to the learning objects of both the course of study and the single discipline. In Italy, the Bologna process (1999) began with the reform of the university in the same year, and the process continues until today. It is possible to see the correspondence between the Dublin descriptors of each course (defined in the European Higher Education Area) and the European Qualification Framework descriptors (EQF at 6–7 Levels).

In this way, the qualification system in Italy guarantees communication between knowledge, capabilities, and competences. The system exists in the European Higher Education Area, the difficulties correspond to the modifications of the global system and the variability of the labour market. The problem is the link between the study programmes and the real situation on the labour market. Is there a mismatch? Further research is needed to improve the professionalisation of educators working with adults.

Competences in the Curricula for Adult Educators in Germany

In Germany, university curricula in adult education are influenced by the Bologna process and the switch to bachelor's and master's degrees. Through the Bologna process, several changes occurred in the study programmes such as the implementation of ECTS points. The first university-level programmes in adult education were established in the 1970s as diploma (*Diplom*) studies. The long tradition of the five-year *Diplom* degree and the evolving changes caused by the Bologna Process created insecurity regarding the competences of adult educators (cf. Kollmannsberger & Fuchs, 2009, p. 48). The main doubt is that six semesters of undergraduate study might not be enough to develop the reflexivity of adult educators.

Study programmes aim to develop the competences, knowledge, and abilities of students to become adult educators capable of acting professionally in the sector of adult education. In order to reach this aim, the discourse in adult education since the 1970s produced several approaches towards developing professional adult educators and their role: The competence-based approach is one approach among others towards the development of adult educators. The approach and also the policy discourse produced several different definitions of competences. One of those is the definition of Erpenbeck and Rosenstiel (cf. 2003, p. 15). They define competences as dispositions for self-governed acting. The competence-based approach is represented by Fuhr (1991), for example. It is based on the definition of competence profiles. Fuhr (1991) developed a number of competences based on

the main functions of an adult educator. He defined guidance, teaching, transfer of knowledge, and abilities and management as the main common tasks of adult educators. Out of those tasks, he defines the necessary competence profile for adult educators. Nittel (2000) mentioned that a competence profile for adult educators has to consider the following aspects:

- interaction with clients
- strategic acting in organisations
- handling with themselves
- transfer of contents.

These competence profiles identify tasks of adult educators and the competences that are necessary to fulfil these tasks. This is what Fuhr (1991) did, and through these competences he concluded what is necessary in the curricula for study programmes in adult education.

Competence profiles usually tend to list different competences without clarifying the interrelations between them. It seems as if professional acting results from the existence of all the competences. In real adult education situations, it can happen that adult educators who have all the necessary competences still do not act competently, whereas those who do not have the necessary competences might be able to act competently. Even though in adult education, competence-based approaches are criticised for this discursive gap, European policy focuses on the development of competence frameworks. That is why the discussion on competences increasingly finds its way into the curricula of study programmes.

The curricula of adult education programmes at German universities mostly include detailed lists of competences that students should acquire (cf. Lattke, 2012, p. 61). Compared to Italy, the curricular focus is mainly on topics of adult education or educational sciences, whereas curricula in Italy also include psychology, philosophy, and other topics (cf. Lattke, 2012, p. 61).

Although study programmes in Germany are more content-oriented, competences and the assessment of competences of adult educators are developed in several projects. These projects try to identify the competences that adult educators need. In a project on the development of a competence pass for adult educators, the project distinguished five different competence areas (Böhm, 2012):

- technical competence that includes knowledge in a specific field and on specific topics
- pedagogical-didactical competence that includes knowledge on how to use specific pedagogical methods and how to transfer knowledge to the learner

- personal/social/reflective competence that includes the ability to reflect critically on one's own actions as well as being able to act in social circumstances
- organisational and management competence
- guidance competence that is focused on situations in which the trainer has to guide or counsel a learner.

In adult education, there are no common job profiles. Adult educators work as programme planners, managers, teachers, and in many other capacities. At the same time, adult education lacks a common and precise competence profile (cf. Kollmannsberger & Fuchs, 2009, p. 49). The result of the missing profiles is that there is no transparent image of the competences an adult educator has; neither is there a set of competences they actually need to become a trainer. The universities do not have common competences in the curricula of their study programmes either; they are very heterogeneous in their structures (cf. Heyl, 2012, p. 49).

Teachers and trainers themselves, as well as managers in adult education, consider didactical and pedagogical competences an important aspect, as well as technical competences (cf. Kollmannsberger & Fuchs, 2009, pp. 51–52). The heterogeneous job profiles and job roles for adult educators create a situation that makes it complicated for universities to define a competence profile that will be promoted through the curriculum.

Requirements on Trainers' Competences in the German Labour Market

Since the establishment of a *Diplom* degree course with the focus on adult and continuing education in 1970, the question of professionalisation in the field of adult education has gone through a radical transformation (cf. Egetenmeyer & Schüssler, 2012, p. 5). Hence, due to the Bologna process in 1999, the field of adult education faced a lot of changes regarding the creation of new consecutive bachelor's and master's programmes. Although the new degree structure seemed to be the hardest challenge, adult education, and especially the process of professionalising adult education trainers, experienced new perspectives with regard to teaching theoretical knowledge and practical skills. The field of adult education at the academic level not only has to impart the skills and competences required but also to assure a qualified profession after graduation (cf. Sgier & Lattke, 2012, p. 35).

Adult education in Germany should be regarded as a serious professional field that cannot be taught part-time or casually but needs qualified full-time employees. That is why Tietgens (1998) emphasises the urgent need for

professionalisation as much as Giesecke does. He calls upon the adult education community to clarify the definition of professionalisation in order to train adult educators in the most efficient way (cf. Tietgens, 1998, pp. 28–36). As the importance of the key word *competence* is related to the requirements of professionalisation and quality assurance, one must first define the term *profession*. The term *profession* cannot be defined without including the term *professionalisation*. Adult education as a profession is a very young discipline, which went through a long process of professionalisation. This process of professionalisation includes the organisation of education in order to develop the area of adult and continuing education towards a profession. Unlike other areas as health or law, this process went through many challenges, as there was not enough awareness to see the importance of adult education as a profession. Nevertheless, the following requirements are important in order to understand the term: (1) a long, specialised apprenticeship in abstracted knowledge (expertise), (2) community-oriented work, and the (3) autonomy of control (professional ethics) (Lehmenkühler-Leuschner, 1993, p. 12). The problem here is that most adult educators do not have a specialised training such as doctors or lawyers do. Moreover, trainers frequently have a wide variety of apprenticeship backgrounds, so as a consequence, the varieties of educational traineeships cannot guarantee an explicit, qualified, and unitary definition of the term *profession*.

Referring to the Bologna process in 1999, the European Qualification Framework, which aims to provide more transparency and mobility in undergraduate and postgraduate studies, in their degree programmes and for their future work base as adult educators, implies specific competences of trainers in Europe (cf. Egetenmeyer & Schüssler, 2012, p. 5). In the field of adult and continuing education, the term *competence* can generally be defined as ‘a person’s ability to act’. These abilities include key qualifications such as personal, social, and methodological competences (‘knowing how to know’). Whereas the term *qualification* deals with the requirements of certain situations, the term *competence* is subject-oriented in this field and caught in a conflict between the right proportion of knowledge and skills (cf. Arnold, 2010, pp. 172–173).

The tasks of German adult educators include a variety of different groups, activity fields, and job titles. Many of the trainers in Germany used to work in *Volkshochschulen* (adult education centres) as so-called *hauptberufliche pädagogische Mitarbeiter/innen* (HpM), which sometimes also included teaching tasks on a full-time job base. Then there are the *nebenberufliche pädagogische Mitarbeiter/innen*, who usually have a second job and train adults in vocational fields. Self-employed adult educators (*freiberufliche pädagogische Mitarbeiter/innen*)

represent another heterogeneous group in the area of continuing education. The problem with these heterogeneous groups is that there is no clear job title for the adult educators because of the diversity in status, employment situations, or motives at the workplace. Hence, German adult educators work under many occupational titles, including trainer, lecturer, course instructor, or counsellor (cf. Kraft, 2006, pp. 22–29). Regarding the tasks and activities of a trainer, there is no systematically collected empirical data in the field of continuing education. Most of the distinctions are made between areas such as teaching, management, or counselling. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) has conducted a pilot study on the ‘Vocational and social situation of teachers in training’ in order to learn more about the lack of professionalisation, funding, and the different fields of adult education trainers.

In the sector of continuing education, it is unclear what kinds of competences are required and expected in this area of practice. Thomas Fuhr, a German professor in adult education, differentiates three specific competence levels: (1) teaching, (2) counselling, and (3) organising. Didactical competences include the ability to impart theoretical knowledge and practical skills through teaching methods related to the school system. Counselling competences deal with the motives and reasons of a person who seeks support for taking important decisions. The competence of organising adult education is pedagogical too, due to the fact that adult education centres are institutions which rely on contracts and inform about the expectations of the right performance of its trainers (cf. Fuhr, 1991, pp. 138–139).

There are many studies that discuss the required competences and skills, for example, the pilot study of Kraft (2006) or the European research programme called ‘Qualified to teach’ (QF2Teach). The research group who worked on the ‘competences in the field of adult and continuing education’ consisted of members from Denmark, Italy, Portugal, and France. The main aim of this project was to create a joint competence profile for learning facilitators in adult and continuing education. The research part through the so-called ‘Delphi study’ consisted of interviews with experts and an online survey in two waves (cf. Bernhardsson, 2012b). The questionnaire is available online in English, and the group consisted of 200 experts (ACE learning facilitators 52.2 per cent, managers 21 per cent, representatives 6.7 per cent, researchers 12.4 per cent, and policymakers 7.7 per cent from 8 different countries) (cf. Bernhardsson, 2012a).

As a result of the Delphi study, a catalogue was created with a total of nine core competences, according to the experts of teachers in the adults’ new formation. For every core competence, there is a brief description of items that include the relevant expertise:

1. *Management of groups and communication*: communicate clearly, manage group dynamics, and manage conflicts
2. *Expertise*: have expertise in their teaching area, apply the didactics in their teaching area
3. *Learning support*: support informal learning, promote the active role of the learner, have a wide repertoire of methods available that involve participants' life experience in the teaching activities
4. *Efficient teaching*: plan teaching activities (time, location, equipment, etc.)
5. *Personal professional development*: start from the needs of learners who use their own experience in the learning environment, understand their learning needs, help them set their own learning goals, be creative and flexible, reflect on their own professional role, be confident, be responsible for their own professional development, welcome criticism, see different perspectives
6. *Promote learning*: motivate and inspire
7. *Learning process analysis*: watch the learning process, evaluate learning outcomes
8. *Self-competence*: Be emotionally stable, open, authentic, and stress-resistant, analyse learning difficulties of learners
9. *Support for learners*: create a safe learning environment, empower learners to apply what they have learned (cf. Bernhardsson & Lattke, 2012, pp. 115ff., translated by the author).

Trainers, Curriculum, and Competences: The Portuguese Context

Trainers' activities have been regulated in Portugal for more than 21 years, and since 1999 there has been an initial vocational training key reference identifying the contents and competences related to trainers' activity. These activities, as well as the definition of trainers' contributions, have evolved a lot in the last decades. When the trainer activity was regulated for the first time in Portugal, it was defined in a classical and traditional way, in terms of their participation in the preparation, planning, development, and evaluation of training.

The Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP), a certifying body, has designed and implemented the initial vocational training key reference, to be used in the trainers' initial vocational training (IEFP, 1999). The creation of this key reference made it possible for trainers to access a certificate of professional competence, ensuring the 'normalisation during the process of acquiring the necessary skills that are inherent to the trainer's profile, by stabilising the key contents, the intervention methodologies, and the minimum length required (for face-to-face training), as well as a suitable evaluation system' (IEFP, 1999, p. 4).

The trainers' initial vocational training included the following contents, during 90 hours, organised in three axes (IEFP, 1999, p. 8) (cf. Table 1).

Table 1: Contents of the Initial Vocational Training (IEFP, 1999)

A. FRAMEWORK AXE	B. OPERATION AXE	EVALUATION AXE
A1. The trainer towards the training systems and context	B1. Educational objectives	C1. Session plan
A2. Learning factors and processes	B2. Learning evaluation	C2. Educational simulation
A3. Group communication and animation	B3. Educational resources	C3. Educational intervention proposal
A4. Educational methods and techniques	B4. Training planning	
	B5. Training follow-up and evaluation	

Regarding the axes of the training, the framework axe aimed to contextualise the area of training, to explore the different stages of the training cycle, and to allow for the identification of social and personal skills essential for the educational interaction. The operation axe aimed to create, through different units, proper conditions for the development of technical skills for the trainer's activity. The integration and mobilisation of the different skills developed in the course of the training were ensured in the application axe. By successfully attending this training, candidates would obtain a proficiency certificate as trainer (CAP).

In 2011, as part of the reform of the vocational training and the establishment of a legal framework of the National Qualifications System, a new system of trainers' training was established (Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2011, p. 2059) and the trainers' initial vocational training was revised and organised in four dimensions: (1) educational, (2) organisational, (3) practical, (4) deontological and ethical (Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2011). 'The deontological and ethical dimension is the one that introduces more new aspects, bearing in mind the previous organisation of trainers' training. This dimension pays special attention to the respect for the professional rules and values, as well as for gender equality and ethnic and cultural diversity.' (Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2011, p. 2960)

The reorganisation of the trainers' training system led to revising the initial vocational training key reference (IEFP, 1999). In 2012, a new key reference was edited (IESE, 2012), organised in the following training units (Table 2).

Table 2: Contents of the Initial Vocational Training (IESE, 2012)

MF1. Trainer: Systems, contexts, and profile
MF2. Initial educational simulation
MF3. Communication and dynamisation of training groups
MF4. Educational methodologies and strategies
MF5. Training operation: from plan to action
MF6. Teaching resources and multimedia
MF7. Collaborative and learning platforms
MF8. Training and learning evaluation
MF9. Final educational simulation

The revision of the key reference illustrates the growing importance of collaborative platforms and multimedia in the learning process. It is expected that the trainer should have a broader capacity than just for producing, giving, and evaluating contents in an efficient and effective way. This is what the key reference makes explicit: 'Nowadays the companies and the market expect more of the trainer: they demand an inspiring, motivating, and mobilising being, able to break stereotypes, pro-active, entrepreneurial, and creative.' (IESE, 2012, p. 5)

The Portuguese repertory for trainers' activities is strongly connected to the proposal of Buiskool et al. (2010). According to the Portuguese initial vocational training key reference (IESE, 2012, p. 6) trainers develop their activity in relation to: information and communication technology (ICT), entrepreneurship, pedagogical creativity, marketing, counselling, project management, team work, social and ethnic diversity, among others. Regarding the trainers' competences, they're related to: 'prepare and plan the learning process; facilitate the learning process orienting it towards the trainee; monitor and evaluate the learning outcomes; manage the lifelong learning dynamic; explore multimedia resources and collaborative platforms; manage the diversity (differentiated and inclusive pedagogy); and adopt entrepreneurship attitudes and creativity.' (IESE, 2012, p. 8)

As pointed out earlier, the trainers' curriculum has evolved a lot in the Portuguese context due to the evolution and continuous transformation of society, companies, politics, and learning challenges. In Portugal, the trainer at the end of the twentieth century was someone who possessed knowledge in a certain domain and should have the pedagogical ability to communicate and evaluate the learning outcomes. The first Portuguese trainers' initial vocational training key reference curriculum was oriented towards this aim. Over the years, the trainers' activity met new challenges—'trainer, nowadays, replies to multiple challenges and has to be prepared to face the needs of an increasingly competitive vocational training

market' (IESE, 2012, p. 5). The revision of the trainers' initial vocational training key reference curriculum demonstrates this progression.

Conclusion

The case studies show different levels of problems regarding the conditions of the job profile of trainers in adult education, the academic curriculum for preparing an adult educator, and the different situations of the labour market. On the other hand, the comparisons show us a similar condition regarding the perception of the adult educator as a professional in the education field. In this sense, some results are clear:

1. The job profile of an adult educator is quite different in the three countries. In Germany, the evolution of educational work in the adult learning field began in the 1970s; today we are facing further developed tasks and capabilities of adult educators. There is a labour market with widely diverse entering possibilities for people who studied adult education. Portugal also had a labour market situation within the system of recognition of prior learning before the financial crisis. This is happening, although a very precise path of professionalisation is present neither in Germany nor in Italy or Portugal. Italy is now defining the rules of the profession, but at the moment there are wide and large sectors where the adult educator/trainer can work without a specific professional level.
2. Competences and capabilities are the neuralgic points of professionalisation. The different levels of professionalism need different types of skills, as research has made clear, but in the real situation of the job there aren't many specifications. The practice is different from the theoretical model. It is necessary to build up a knowledge base more and more linked with the practical situation.
3. University curricula are similar in Italy and Germany, whereas in Portugal more attention and emphasis is on the vocational education and training system. A very interesting similar situation happens in some Italian and German universities in a European project for the development of a transnational curriculum in several European universities. The project (ESRALE Project, European Studies and Research in Adult Learning and Education; Project Number: 540117-LLP-1-2013-1-DE-ERASMUS-EQMC) intends to develop an adult education curriculum featuring the same contents and same ECTS for each course. In Italy and Germany, a project for developing a similar core curriculum in the European Master in Adult Education² has been underway for ten years.

2 See ESRALE Project: ESRALE – European Studies and Research in Adult Learning and Education Project Number: 540117-LLP-1-2013-1-DE-ERASMUS. The Project

4. The labour markets are different in Italy, Germany, and Portugal, and the perspectives of the adult educator change in these countries. However, it is possible to name the problem of cultural consideration and an adult educator's economic profile as depending on the laws of each country. In Portugal, legislative changes have put the job profile of an adult educator in a different light, with more secure definitions.

It is very important to compare curricula³, competences, and degree levels between European countries because jobs in the social and educational fields are very important for democracy. Lifelong learning is impossible without adult educators, and a project manager in social and educational sectors must have the clear competences for building new and free societies. Therefore, studies in adult education and learning are at the base of the well-being of every democratic country in Europe and the world.

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is working on the definition of core competences for degree programmes in adult education and learning at the master's level. The network of ten European universities looks at the possibilities of having joint titles and joint curricula. Cf. www.esraleproject.org (04/2015).

- 3 For other informations about current structures in adult education study programmes, see also the contribution of Semrau, Vieira and Guida in this book.

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