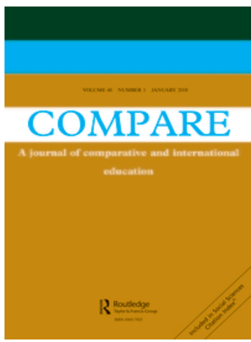

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Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education

ISSN: 0305-7925 (Print) 1469-3623 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ccom20

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To cite this article: Paula Guimaraes, Emilio Lucio-Villegas & Peter Mayo (2018) Southern-European signposts for critical popular adult education: Italy, Portugal and Spain, Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 48:1, 56-74, DOI: 10.1080/03057925.2017.1283584

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2017.1283584

Published online: 10 Mar 2017.

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COMPARE, 2018
VOL. 48, NO. 1, 56–74
https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2017.1283584

Southern-European signposts for critical popular adult education: Italy, Portugal and Spain

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ABSTRACT
This paper focuses on three Southern European countries, Italy, Portugal and Spain, to explore examples of projects that provide signposts for a critical popular education that contributes to an ongoing democratic process – one whereby citizens are developed as social actors and members of a collectivity rather than simply passive producers/consumers. This approach would serve as an alternative to the traditional 'top-down' and current hegemonic economy-oriented discourses. In so doing, the paper seeks to redress an imbalance in the English language adult education and learning literature that often overlooks alternative discourses to the mainstream on and from this part of the world.

KEYWORDS
Adult education; lifelong learning; fascism; democracy; social-purpose

Introduction

This paper offers a comparative analysis of adult education and learning[1] (AEL) provision in three Southern European countries, Italy, Portugal and Spain. It highlights their struggles over time with respect to a democratising education and shows how these have led to important developments in AEL. These are nowadays overlooked by a somewhat homogenising and economy-oriented EU Lifelong Learning (LLL) paradigm. There is scant visibility of Southern Europe in published English-language research concerning comparative AEL. This paper attempts to contribute to redressing this situation. It highlights the juxtaposition of hegemonic agendas, both historical and present, including the EU LLL agendas (Green 2006; Schuetze 2006; Panitsides and Anastasiadou 2015), against those that have a less industry-driven and more popular, including people-driven (comprising worker-driven [Livingstone 2013]), agenda. The three countries have enough in common to provide material for a comparative study on AEL in Southern Europe from a historical and contemporary perspective.

Main argument

The EU's LLL paradigm (see Field 2010), originally introduced in 1996 by the European Roundtable of Industrialists (see *Education for Life: A European Strategy* [Karaimo,

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1989]) with an emphasis on the 'knowledge economy', employability and competitiveness, has created a hegemonic adult education orientation overlooking the traditions of different countries and the discourses they have been providing. Funding structures, which generate economy-oriented discourses, are tying EU member states to this paradigm. This said, the effects of these discourses are not uniform. Rather, as will be argued in this paper, alternatives to the hegemonic economy-oriented discourse and other 'top-down' processes of adult learning, historical and contemporary, have abounded in many countries. Alternative discourses project a notion of AEL as being more inclined towards developing citizens as social actors. They are present in several European countries irrespective of their geographical location. They are often context-oriented, confronting specific issues that arise from the specific milieu. They often underline the collective and relational dimension of learning. The latter is key since the more radical versions of these alternative projects place emphasis on non-hierarchical, more flat and therefore democratic social relations that can prefigure more horizontal relations in society, including production and the nature of the State itself (Corrigan and Sayer 1985).[2]

The more imaginative projects extend beyond reductionist views of persons and project them in the round – people with multiple subjectivities. This stands in contrast to conventional adult education, which is often top down, individualistic in orientation and has a reductionist view of adult learners (notably as workers or potential workers), seeing them as primarily fitting the economy rather than engaging critically with it. They are often projected as atomised individuals reduced to the interrelated two-dimensional role of producers-consumers.

This paper focuses specifically on three countries, namely Italy[3], Portugal and Spain, which share many characteristics. For instance, these countries belong to Southern Europe and the Mediterranean[4], sharing 'the same climate, the same seasonal rhythm, the same vegetation, the same colours … the same landscapes … in short, the same ways of life' (Braudel 1972, 235). They also share similarities in their religious and political histories and contemporary economic situations, giving rise to different forms of popular and community AEL. This paper is concerned with alternatives to the hegemonic economy-oriented discourses that underpinned forms of popular community and that emerged in these three countries. This paper is written with a view to exploring possibilities for adult education's contribution to an ongoing democratic process,[5] guided by a sense of social justice and ecological sensitivity. We highlight this alternative discourse, from the three countries, to underline adult learning's social dimensions at a time when these very same dimensions are being downplayed. Currently, the three countries under consideration face grave economic/austerity issues, rendering them more dependent on larger 'colonising' entities. The paper seeks to redress an imbalance in the English-language literature on AEL that often neglects the emergence and institutionalisation of alternative discourses to the mainstream on and from this part of the world.

Theoretical framework

Lima and Guimarães (2011) have proposed three approaches to AEL provision. Approach 1, the democratic-emancipatory educational approach, is the one associated with Paulo Freire and a host of other figures and movements throughout history. This approach is geared to enabling communities to foster a more democratic environment, marked by

greater social justice and ecological sustainability. People learn collectively, not simply to fit present structures, but to contribute towards changing them. This approach is typical of education settings and experiences that fall within the best critical pedagogical traditions. Freirean popular education exemplifies this approach: education is regarded as not neutral, but political. The approach therefore entails learning through social participation in public and democratic life. This approach is guided by a conception of learners as social actors. It also entails a notion of AEL that extends beyond purely individualistic interests to embrace collective interests governed by the Freirean maxim that people liberate themselves not on their own but in concert with others (Torres 1990, 2014).

Approach 2, formal AEL and 'second chance' learning, part of 'education for modernization and social control' (Lima and Guimarães, 2011, 48–55), makes experience and collective learning recede in importance. Adult education and learning effectively becomes adult schooling entailing official, standardised and harmonised pedagogical and educational processes. The concern is with not social transformation, but social integration – learning the basic skills and other knowledge needed to survive in the current social system. Adult education and learning can take the form of adult evening classes, often encouraging conformity, governmentality (in Foucault's sense of being governed at a distance and by proxy) and social integration. This can easily be combined with Approach 3, AEL in the context of Human Resource Management and Development (HRMD), as exemplified by the EU's appropriation of the former UNESCO Lifelong Education concept, now morphed into LLL (Bauman 2013). This entails national support through policy discourses that simultaneously emphasise productivity, flexibility, 'employability' and HRMD. It is all about learning for the economy and not about engaging critically with and changing it. The overriding concern is for a community to attract investment and therefore generate jobs. Worker-credentialing is a major concern. In the case of Italy, Portugal and Spain, this drive towards an economy-oriented provision is fuelled by several factors, not least the economic meltdown and debt crisis. As with most typologies, these types of AEL approaches would, in our view, serve a heuristic purpose. By and large, AEL imposed from above, for example to prepare people for 'employability', tends to fit Approaches 2 and 3, which are quite complementary and related since they can easily be subsumed under the 'employability' rubric (see Torres 2013 for another typology), one focusing on basic general AEL required for 'employability', the other more directly related to the work process itself. Alternative socially committed and community oriented approaches are easily associated with Approach 1. 'On the ground' situations are, however, often much more complex than any of these neat classifications would suggest. The three types are not exclusive to each other. For instance, EU project-funding structures *prima facie* appear to favour one particular approach. However, they often attract organisations and individuals who creatively and skilfully manage to worm their own alternative pedagogical agendas into the project concerned. This attests to the incomplete and therefore non-monolithic nature of hegemony (rule by consent and force). Hegemonic structures (including dominant funding structures) contain, within their own interstices, the spaces for change to occur. Much depends on the degree of democratic possibilities of the context in question – the balance between consent and coercion. We shall see how, in each of the three countries, AEL approaches were historically affected by shifts in this balance.

Our critical analysis of adult education in the three countries is informed by an emancipatory vision of adult education that has its roots in Freirean pedagogy and that of similar educators such as Don Lorenzo Milani, with the emphasis on an education that fosters reflection on action (praxis) and on reading/writing the word and the world, hence critical

literacy. The overall theoretical emphasis is on the potential of different programmes and projects to either enable people to fit the existing system or else contribute to collectively transforming it. Rather than being opposites, these are ends of a continuum as we recognise that struggles to move to the more 'transformative' end are fraught with obstacles along the way ('limit situations' in Freire's terms), often leading to short-term survival strategies for hopefully longer-term gains in the never ending struggle for social justice.

Historical and present situations

All three countries belong to the same European region, having cultural and historical links between them. Southern parts of Italy, including the islands, were under Spanish domination for centuries. There are also historic links between Portugal and Spain, the two countries having had a dynastic union from 1580 to 1640. All three European countries are geographically close to North Africa, which historically had a strong influence on the culture, including architecture and music, of some of their regions. We can speak of Euro-Arab cultural legacies in regions such as Sicily, Andalucía and parts of Portugal. Additionally, these countries have been situated on either side of the colonial divide, often being colonisers and colonised, with Portugal also said to have been 'informally colonised' through a perceived historical subservience to Britain (Paraskeva 2006).

All three emerged from different situations of domination: religious imposition (e.g., the Inquisition's presence in all three)[6] and authoritarian control through Fascism. The democratic openings throughout Spanish and Portuguese twentieth-century history are characterised by a series of 'stop-starts'. In Spain, for instance, the Second Republic established a break in the continuity of authoritarian thought, provoking a violent conservative reaction, through a military coup and civil war, involving landowners and the Church hierarchy among others. And yet there can be no power without resistance. It is partly in the historical resistances to authoritarian modes of governance that one finds pockets of democratic AEL. For most of the twentieth century, all three countries were characterised by material poverty and, in several of them, by an industrialisation process that was slower in some regions when compared to many industrialised Northern European nations. The slow industrial development is the result of internal colonisations (Aprile 2010) within a single nation (in Italy, any vestige of industrial production was destroyed as part of the North's colonisation of the *Mezzogiorno* [De Rosa 2004]). The occupational structure of these three countries comprises traditional/executive professions and manual occupations. In these countries education has been a source of social differentiation between 'white collar' and 'blue collar' work. This situation reinforces the tendency to accord more prestige to formal 'top-down' education as a means of social distinction, in contrast to vocational formation, which remains weak. Of course, there is the important caveat that one can always come across cases of regional and temporal differentiation in different countries. Unemployment is particularly strong in all three. Spain, for instance, had, by November 2013, the second highest unemployment rate among EU member states, at 26.7%[7], and its youth unemployment (under 25 years) is 57.7%, the highest in the EU 28. [8] Portugal had lower rates than the EU average in the early 2000s.[9] However, with the adjustment of the country's productive structure to international competitive demands and the recent global economic crisis, besides the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the EU-led programme, this rate has increased over the last years, reaching 16.2% in 2013[10]. In 2010,

Italy officially had 2,194,000, unemployed (ISTAT 2010), that is, 27.7%, with the highest levels registered in the Southern regions.[11] The three countries share a history of having had high functional illiteracy levels in the twentieth century, and continue to do so in some of their regions. Uneven levels of development in Italy (the North versus the South and islands) led to the rate of illiteracy in the previous century hovering around 70% in some regions. In Portugal, the illiteracy levels were around 70% at the start of the twentieth century in a hitherto mainly rural society (Candeias 2001). In Spain as recently as 2011 there were 730,000, illiterate people, 67% of whom were women. As with Italy, literacy attainment imbalances between some regions in Spain reflect different degrees of industrial development. The three countries also register significant early school leaver rates; EU statistics show that early school leaver rates for 2012 were 27.2% for Portugal, 24.9% for Spain and 17.6% for Italy,[12] with the incidence in the Italian case higher for males[13], while the average EU rate is 12.8% (MEE 2014, 9). Furthermore, they now face the situation of having changed from sites of mass emigration to ones of mass immigration. In each of the three countries we note a particular inward-outward migration flow: highly qualified young people emigrate looking for adequate employment, while immigrants take unskilled jobs. Migration provides contexts for interplays between instrumental and broader forms of AEL. Quite noteworthy, even here, is the complex interplay between exogenous and endogenous AEL approaches. Apart from the EU's dominant AEL discourse, some of the former approaches derive directly, in the case of Portugal and Spain, from the countries' ex-colonies. This might reflect what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2001) calls a country's semi-peripheral condition, that is, positioned between the centre (regions wielding industrial and cultural power) and the peripheries of Africa and other parts of the industrially underdeveloped world. This, however, appears to apply more to Santos' own country, Portugal, than to Spain and Italy. There are at least two, mainly EU-driven, factors that condition adult education in all three countries: the promotion of 'good practice' from afar and the imposition of indicators to evaluate policy-driven practice. The EU's funding structures play an important role here. The AEL provision of each of the three countries will now be shown separately. In each case, the brief 'country review' will focus on some of the documented landmarks in the nation's AEL history. The material for each case will be presented against the background of alternation between democratic openings (including, in Italy's case, revolutionary openings), conservative totalitarian reactions and democratic restoration, eventually culminating in the current contestation between broad social purpose educational initiatives and more hegemonic neoliberal impositions. Lessons will be gleaned from these country reviews. The overriding narrative is that of struggles in adult education for greater democratic openings at different times in twentieth century history and later that had to come to terms with the emergence of authoritarian regimes or, more recurrently, 'one size fits all' international pressures. These pressures, certainly contemporary Neoliberal ones, are intended to integrate the country concerned into a global economy. In contrast to some of the community-oriented projects and actions we shall foreground, these neoliberal pressures reflect a deficit model of learning for development (see Aikman et al. 2016).

Italy[14]

Italy's twentieth-century AEL history is dominated by conventional forms of provision. For the most part, a rather liberal AEL, through so-called popular universities, made its presence

felt, varying from place to place. The popular universities were criticised by Gramsci (1971, 330) as a type of AEL 'for' rather than 'of' the working and peasant classes, likened to 'trashy baubles' traded by English merchants with African natives for 'nuggets of gold'.

The post-war period featured attempts to combat illiteracy, still widespread in the Southern regions (Schettini 2010). One notices a shift from the popular schools, established in 1947, to courses in adult basic education at elementary school level. Though ostensibly based on the conventional view of AEL as adult schooling intended to integrate a previously dispersed population into the new post-Risorgimento state (the state that emerged following Italy's unification), these types of AEL can be regarded as sites of contestation open to the perpetually contradictory processes of both domestication and empowerment. Alberto Manzi (Farné 2011) devised a UNESCO award winning programme of teaching literacy via the state television company, RAI, called *Non è mai troppo tardi* (It's never too late to learn). He conducted similar literacy programmes in Latin America, where his efforts were viewed with suspicion by the dominant elites, thus underlining the political significance of even conventional literacy education in contexts marked by gross social inequalities.

Today one comes across many important and visible institutions such as the Universities of the Third Age, when Italy has the highest percentage of adults aged 65+ in the EU (ISTAT 2011, 5), and the non age-specific *Università della Libera Età* (University for all ages) . Once again, as with most conventional AEL, they, *prima facie*, do not appear to be sources of progressive education. Again, however, much depends on the actors involved. The Catholic Church and its wider network offer courses in the preparation for marriage and parenthood. All this seems conventional. Yet one comes across Catholic voluntary organisations, especially in the North, that are not always in tune with the official church, some influenced by don Lorenzo Milani's critical pedagogy, one that focused on radical social justice interpretations of the Holy Scriptures, social class and anti-racist politics, anti-militarisation, anti-consumerism, collective learning and writing and the notion of people as 'sovereign citizens' exercising the 'right to govern' (Batini, Mayo, and Surian 2013). Many of these Catholic organisations are involved in the AEL of immigrants. This shows that no institution is monolithic as even the most ostensibly conventional organisations involved in AEL can be conceived of as sites of struggle .

In more recent times, during Berlusconi's 1Vth Cabinet (2008–2011), the AEL and training documents, the White Book on Welfare and the De Rita Commission's report[15]), were produced. They placed emphasis on companies' roles in the formation of adults (a neoliberal facet). We come across criticism of this choice of emphasis (Pensabene 2010), with Pensabene lamenting the lack of an all-embracing and systematic strategy for permanent education conceived of as a public rather than a production-consumption good.

Furthermore, during the past 15 years AEL has been mainly centred around Permanent Territorial Centres and evening courses, both organised within conventional schools, the former in middle schools and the latter in institutes of higher education. The small centres, mainly in peripheral or rural areas, have been shut down and replaced by Provincial Centres for the Instruction of Adults, which administer AEL independently with respect to the school system, but still within the logic and context of formal education. The centres provide courses at the levels of first-cycle instruction (primary and secondary first level), secondary education (second level) and functional literacy, including literacy for immigrants (EC 2008–2009, 162)

Social purpose popular AEL

Italy had its share of ostensibly progressive political AEL experiences from which lessons can be gleaned. They highlight pedagogical approaches at odds with the dominant current hegemonic 'employability' discourse.

We can reach as far back as the attempts at radical industrial democracy during the revolutionary Turin years (1919–1920). The Factory councils, consisting of workers' representatives, were the agents involved. They were conceived as educational vehicles, based on the soviet model, intended to change the relations of production and accord workers greater mental and strategic control over the entire production process. The proposed education focused on holistic vocational and administrative skills. This is one of Italy's major historical contributions to progressive workers' education, though it did not last long. Terminated by the failure of the revolution of which it was meant to form part (the whole movement was isolated) and subsequently the fascist takeover (Clark 1977), the project, according to Antonio Gramsci's theorisation, was not about learning for work, but about learning to engage critically and holistically with work. The intention here was to democratise the social relations of production themselves, radically changing the nature of the economy. This is a far cry from the present day discourse of education to fit the economy's requirements for 'employability', with the agenda set by employers and industrial elites rather than appearing as a more ostensibly workers' agenda (Mayo 2015). While Nazi-Fascist authoritarianism would have crushed any attempt to revive this approach, the reaction that followed the end of this Regime was characterised by a swing in the democratic direction. The post-war period, throughout Europe, featured educational efforts for 'social reconstruction' and de-Nazification, reflected at UNESCO's Elsinore World Adult Education Conference. Aldo Capitini, an anti-fascist and peace activist, seems to have embodied that spirit. He set up Centres for Social Orientation, AEL sources for a grassroots democracy (*Omnicrazia*). These centres initially started in Perugia, spreading to other localities. This was all about learning to equip oneself with the tools to help develop 'democracy from below' as opposed to rule from above (Batini, Mayo, and Surian 2013).

Much later, in the early-1970s, negotiations between the metal workers and employers led to the so-called '150 hours' study leave, intended not for vocational purposes but for acquiring a recognised level of secondary education and for personal cultural development. Not as radical as the Factory Council project, this effort still had a strong democratic purpose. It led, among other things, to courses, around a theme (monographic courses), held by women for women at higher-secondary school and university levels – important vehicles for the spread of feminism.[16] Other landmarks include the social and community programmes developed by Danilo Dolci in Trappeto and Partinico, Sicily. They were geared towards community action and collective mobilisation in a Mafia-controlled territory where the tensions between authoritarianism and emancipation through education involve dealing with a deep-seated form of 'traditional authority' and 'patron-client' relationship, the latter being the process whereby people show deference to those in a position of power and, in so doing, gain access to resources (Davis 1977, 132).

Without a national AEL strategy, everything is devolved to the locality and its surrounding territory (the *territorio* approach), often a site of contestation. One documented case concerns 'social creation' in the Veneto – community and environmental renewal in Verona. It involves graduates engaging in agricultural production to render generally available and

affordable those fresh land products that would otherwise constitute a small niche market 'luxury' (De Vita 2009). Vita and Piussi (2013) maintain that the Social Solidarity Economy also includes Social Solidarity Purchasing Groups and consumer associations, said to have 'great potential for self-learning that occurs within groups and for capacity building'(304).

They also refer to the influence of examples from the Madres de Plaza de Mayo on the social creation projects (294), as the Latin American influence on Italian AEL is not to be discounted. The lessons to be derived from this and the other more progressive examples are those of persons learning not simply to be two-dimensional beings, passive producers and consumers, but to be well informed and critically engaging social actors and change agents at work and in the public sphere.

Portugal[17]

As with Italy, Portugal's major AEL provision for most of the twentieth century and later was of the conventional type. During the First Republic (1910–1926), the illiteracy rate stood at 70.3% and this led to conventional forms of AEL involving second-chance learning. Later, in 1926, when Portugal was under authoritarian rule, illiteracy was tackled through a national formal AEL campaign (1952–1956) meant to support plans for an industrialisation process. Mainly targeted at the poor rural population, the overall programme included reading, writing and maths classes. The contents and pedagogical approach were ideologically conditioned by the prevailing regime. The programme was also meant to favour deference to the Catholic Church and instil respect for 'nationalistic' values (a monocultural view of what is national) and a particular patriarchal concept of 'family' (Ruas 1978; Barcoso 2002). While some social purpose and critical forms of AEL existed, the prevailing form, then and later, continued to be traditional and economy-oriented. In 1986, for instance, a basic law of education was enacted, leading to formal AEL provision that consisted of evening 'adult schooling' courses (Lima 2008).

During the 1990s the EU exerted the major AEL influence in the country. Based on the EU's LLL guidelines, a new AEL and training policy (1999–2011), in the context of HRMD, was adopted. In 1999/2000 the Knowing+Programme for the Expansion and Development of Adult Education and Training was established. This development was in keeping with hegemonic globalisation trends and Portugal's declared economic modernisation objectives (Guimarães 2011).

In 2005 the New Opportunities Initiative was launched within the framework of the national employment and technological plans. The aim was to raise adult qualification levels. Adults were meant to reach basic and secondary school education and professional qualification levels in accordance with the National and European Qualifications frameworks (Levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 in the latter case). Importance was accorded to the recognition, validation and certification of competencies through recognition and assessment of prior learning occurring in different ways. Both adult education and learning and training courses were given prominence. These forms of provision involved formal AEL and 'second-chance' learning. By 2011, more than 500,000 adults had upgraded their qualifications. These forms of provision were complemented by other training activities directed at employees. The overall concern was with human resource management and development (Lima and Guimarães 2011).

In 2011, the financial aid programme established by the IMF, the Central European Bank and the European Commission (the Troika) led to the suspension of the government's AEL

policy that had been introduced in 2000. However, vocational training carried out by larger companies has grown considerably in terms of both provision and number of beneficiaries in the last few years. This clearly suggests a strong preference for an instrumental view of AEL to satisfy economic concerns – the quest for increasing competitiveness and productivity. It also suggests a general and official devaluation of the importance of critical and emancipatory education.

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This is not to say that the latter type of provision has not existed. There is evidence of emancipatory popular and workers' education available during the first part of the twentieth century. Some initiatives of non-formal family education, women's education and community education were also provided later in the century but it was only in the 1960s that several projects of critical and popular education were to be found, mainly in such urban areas as Lisbon and Porto (Ruas 1978). During the same decade, social movements connected to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and cooperatives had made their presence felt in AEL. Some of these activities were carried out by organisations that offered resistance to the autocratic Salazar/Caetano regimes. They were either supported by the Communist Party or else linked to progressive sectors of Portuguese society (Canário 2007).

Efforts at popular education were stepped up after the 1974 bloodless 'Carnations Revolution' that toppled the totalitarian regime then led by Marcelo Caetano. UNESCO became the influential agency during this period, encouraging a democratic-emancipatory educational approach (Melo and Benavente 1978). Since then, AEL featured prominently, though intermittently, in the public policy agenda. In fact, from 1974 to 1976 and from 1979 to the mid-1980s, public policies focused on civil society intervention and popular education (Melo 2006).

Today, one can still encounter democratic and critical education activities in urban and rural areas. The AEL work of the *Associação Moinho da Juventude* (Youth Mill Association) involves former Portuguese colonies and African immigrants. Adult education and learning initiatives in rural development are carried out by the *Associação In Loco* and *Agência para o Desenvolvimento Local do Sudoeste Alentejano* (Local Development Agency in South-East Alentejo). One should also mention here the learning dimensions of activities carried out by the *Que se Lixe a Troika!*[18] (To hell with the Troika) social movement, not a strictly educational movement. Universities of the Third Age, aiming at personal and social development, abound, while several NGOs are involved in local critical education projects. Furthermore, a plethora of critical emancipatory cultural and educational activities occurred after the 1974 Revolution. These were carried out in the spirit of popular education, often betraying a Latin American influence[19]. This is understandable given the close historical (colonial/postcolonial) and therefore cultural ties between Portugal and Brazil.

As Alberto Melo (1985) pointed out, literacy education was avoided or subsumed within a larger project where the immediate learning experiences highlighted what the people 'had in abundance … popular culture, the people's own store of knowledge, their oral and manual skills, in short, their own living culture' (42–3), rather than what they lacked. This was meant to eschew a potential 'deficit model' typical of conventional formal AEL (see Aikman et al., 2016). And yet despite the huge influence of Paulo Freire on Portuguese popular education, Lind and Johnston (1986) make reference to a Freire-inspired state-sponsored programme

following the revolution and the process of transition to civilian rule. They state, however, that the national directors were eventually suspended because of the State-sponsored programme's 'political implication of action or potential action against the government' (61).

This notwithstanding, we have shown that there are sufficient important insights to suggest that even Portugal has lessons to offer for a genuinely emancipatory education. The insight regarding the celebration of what adults have rather than what they lack constitutes a perfect example. This serves to project the image of participants in the AEL programmes as subjects rather than objects, makers and bearers of culture rather than simply recipients in a top-down educational transmission process.

Spain[20]

As with Italy and Portugal, most of the history of AEL in Spain is of the conventional type that can be traced back to the 1857 'Sunday and Night' lessons targeted at adult people. They underlined the notion of AEL as 'adult schooling' (Collado 1988). Twentieth-century provision centred for the most part on literacy and adult basic education, which 60% of the population lacked at the turn of that century (Viñao 1990). Governments preceding and immediately succeeding the Second Republic paid lip service to AEL. The Primo de Rivera and Francisco Franco dictatorship periods were distinguished by a general repression of culture, education, workers and trade unions.

With the rise of democracy, AEL became a matter of public interest, especially from 1975 to 1978 – *La Transición* (The Transition period). There were barriers to progress, however, with the risk of a new dictatorship persisting until 1981. Furthermore, on its EU accession, Spain had been grappling with grave economic concerns. One had to wait till 1990 for a new Education Act to be established – 15 years after the end of the dictatorship. Even so, the most important types of AEL were secondary education and university continuing education. The main focus subsequently shifted to professional training, a situation that persists today. All of this occurs in a context marked by a significant level of illiteracy and an alarming school dropout rate.

There is no AEL law at the national state level, but there are such laws in various regions. There is a lack of uniformity concerning policies and strategies. Each territory's 'Autonomous Government', responsible for 83.3% of the total education provision, is capable of adopting its own education measures.

In this context, it is very difficult to identify an explicit state-wide LLL strategy. New legislative AEL measures, however, have recently been adopted by the Conservative Government, all in synch with the EU-driven neoliberal 'employability' paradigm. Furthermore, a new Vocational Education and Training (VET) model, under exclusive State control, has been adopted. Adult education and learning from the state perspective is nowadays mostly about markets, 'employability' and traditional values, although the caveats, made for the Italian and Portuguese cases, apply.

The foregoing would suggest that an implicit national LLL strategy can be detected. Its development, however, differs from one territory to another. One might therefore note similar tendencies, but differences in practice. Furthermore there have been shifting discourses. In Andalusia, for instance, there has been a shift from a community-oriented 'liberating education' concept to one marked by 'banking education', in Freire's terms, and a schooling approach. The focus is on dispatching diplomas and adapting people to the 'knowledge

society' and the 'global knowledge economy'. This is all in keeping with current hegemonic conceptualisations of LLL policy-making and practice.

Social purpose popular AEL

Spain, however, has had and continues to have its fair share of social purpose AEL. Given the history of loose national and at times regional state control, there is strong evidence of AEL being strongly rooted in popular education, that is, people/community-driven (Diez-Palomar and Flecha 2010). Importance is accorded, in this regard, to adult learners being social actors rather than passive knowledge recipients (Lucio-Villegas 2015). We can point here to a number of projects dating from the demise of the Franco dictatorship and the subsequent gradual swing to democracy. We would point here to the Peasant Schools located in such rural areas as Castilla-Leon. They have been focusing on safeguarding a rural way of life. The Peasant Schools were an important source of reference for people working in rural AEL and have influenced the development of the Rural University. The educational emphasis here is on stemming migration flows from hinterland to coastal tourist areas. The major issues discussed today at the Rural University are: food security, biological agriculture and the dignity of country people. One of their vehicles, the *Plataforma Rural* (Rural Platform), [21] focuses on recovering a rural way of life through the creation of discussion learning settings. At a micro-level, we can mention *La Verde* (The Green), a cooperative of former *jornaleros* (day labourers), devoted to organic agriculture and traditional seed recovery – all involving non-formal and informal community AEL processes.

Also worth mentioning is the Pedagogical Renovation Movement (MRP), led by teachers. This is a lifelong education movement gravitating round the UNESCO sense of a holistic view of education 'from cradle to the grave', as opposed to simply an instrumental economy-oriented one. This was, for many years, an energetic new movement that pushed for a holistic education throughout Spain. By the middle of the 1980s, some of the movement's members were co-opted by the government. Nevertheless, the movement left its mark on the subsequent development of community education throughout Spain (Lucio-Villegas 2012). The MRP case attests to the frequently shifting terrain in AEL, with a Gramscian 'war of position' being waged by movements and state, characterised by resistance, critical appropriation and the constant threat of co-optation.

As with Italy and Portugal, one can feel Latin American influences in Spanish AEL, notably those of Paulo Freire. One encounters Freirean inspired literacy work in various parts of Spain. This includes critical literacy activities among students and teachers who organise classrooms against bursary cuts on the streets . One also finds Freire's influence among the *indignados*' (the Indignant) activities in the various squares and tents concerning *¡Democracia Real Ya!* (Real Democracy Now).

Latin American influences are often felt in projects concerning community action. In Seville there were instances of critical AEL, involving popular participation in 'deliberative democracy' and active citizenship, through the Participatory Budget experiment (2003–2007). This initiative draws on Brazil's Porto Alegre experience. We would also highlight the project of 'history from below' at the Manolo Reyes School, also in Seville. The School runs a 'collective memory' project (Lucio-Villegas et al., 2009) regarding the Civil War and the 40 years of Franco rule (English and Mayo 2012, 137). People, young, middle-aged and old, collectively collate and codify painful 'oral' history, involving different media (printed matter, film documentaries) and community research/learning strategies.

One of the most illustrious victims of the Franco reaction to the democratically-elected Second Republic Government was the poet and playwright Federico Garcia Lorca. He was murdered at the beginning of the Civil War. Lorca's community theatre and learning work, carried out when he was a law student with his travelling university ensemble *La Barraca* (the Shack), left its mark not only in Spain but also across the Atlantic, specifically in Harlem-NYC, where his troupe took its work (English and Mayo 2012, 136). This work involved dramatic performances in communities followed by or interspersed with interactive exchanges with the participating audience about the aspect of 'reality' being represented. Such activities testify to the richness of the Second Republic's popular education experiences (Otero-Urtaza 2011). Several projects emerged after the end of the Franco regime in reaction to its suppression of regional cultures and their festivals, which had been replaced by official festivals. One of the documented projects in the Barcelona area involved reinstituting the fiesta, rendering it a form of AEL that brought people together to learn about their own culture and surroundings. Issues affecting the community were considered 'shared experiences'. An institution, '*Universitat Nova*' (New University), was created to support and give shape to these projects (Bofill 1985, 59–60).

This example, and the preceding ones, attests to the presence in Spain's modern history of approaches to AEL that are different from those promoted by the mainstream neoliberal discourse. They alternatively stress the collective, communal aspect of learning, projecting an image of participatory citizenship at odds with the atomised versions prevalent today.

Commonalities and complexities

It is hopefully clear from the foregoing country reviews that Italy, Portugal and Spain have a variety of historical experiences that deserve wider mention in the international AEL literature. These initiatives were born out of struggles around issues concerning traditional authority, and the privileges that go with it, and democratic freedom, some of which provoking periods of totalitarian reactions that suppressed these very same initiatives . Once these periods of overt repression were superseded, the pendulum swung in the direction of projects underpinned by an understanding of democratic freedom and community organisation as the basis for this engagement (bottom-up and civil society built) rather than top-down (state) policies. Of course nothing is clear cut, and projects such as the '150 hours' in Italy represent collaboration between states and unions in which the latter asserted their agenda after having included non-instrumental (vocational) education in their bargaining strategy. Furthermore, the challenges of globalisation, in its different forms, persist, as well as the need to provide employment opportunities and accommodate migrants. The 'jobs crisis' has to be confronted head on.

Conventional top-down AEL and training

The quest for jobs and investment make top-down forms of 'employability-oriented' AEL and training imperative given the general tendency to describe any crisis connected with this situation a 'skills crisis' rather than a 'job crisis' (Marshall 1997). The blame is conventionally apportioned to countries and individuals because of their lack of investment in education and training rather than to a global system incapable of creating jobs. The current state of fiscal crisis that each country is facing makes the propensity towards top-down AEL and

training more pronounced. Lifelong learning of the 'employability' (this does not mean employment [Gelpi 2002]) type therefore becomes the panacea. Meanwhile, as already indicated, students who invest more in education have to emigrate from Italy, Portugal and Spain in search of that 'standard of living' to which their formal studies made them aspire. They, like many others, especially those with low formal education levels, experience significant difficulties in accessing the labour market owing to the financial crisis.

Furthermore the industrial economic backwardness of huge swathes of territories in the three countries continues to make conventional literacy acquisition, never mind new literacies (information and communications technology, etc.), a recurring feature of AEL provision. The pressure for continuing education of the basic type is also exacerbated by the high school leaving rate experienced in these three countries. And yet there have been few specific actions to redress this situation, which has been aggravated by recent cuts in funding as part of the financial crisis 'austerity' measures. This and the foregoing situation concerning literacy encourages greater conformity with dominant policy discourses, mainly the EU LLL policy discourse. Beyond 'employability' LLL, funding is more likely to be provided for social integration projects, especially those concerning immigrant integration. Immigration, particularly from sub-Saharan Africa, continues to be a key issue for AEL in the three countries. This poses new challenges for the EU (Augustin and Bak Jørgensen 2016; Cortinovis 2016) and AEL[22] where issues of domestication and emancipation, as heuristically framed by Paulo Freire, come to the fore. The demands of immigrants' integration or relocation can easily lay stress on conventional education. There has, however, been talk in these countries of conceiving of immigrants as 'subjects', in the Freire sense, who can both teach and learn (Mayo 2004).

Social purpose popular AEL

The division, or, more appropriately, the tension, between domestication and emancipation brings us to the main affirmation of this paper. There exist enough projects throughout AEL's history in the three countries to offer grist for a holistic and 'bottom-up' approach to learning. This is the kind of approach overlooked by dominant LLL mantras in proclamations and policy documents, if not in actual practice; there are people who act socially as change agents 'in and against' systems.

With regard to work, we have seen examples of alternative programmes for employees devised with a concern for genuine industrial democracy. There is mileage in the Italian examples provided by the Turin Factory Councils that sought to remove the perennial barrier between conception and execution within the work process, positing that a genuine workers' education entails learning to acquire knowledge of the entire process of production and surrounding social life. Later, and less revolutionary, were the attempts by unions, through their bargaining power, to extract out of employers and the state possibilities for workers' education of a not strictly instrumental nature, but a broader one – an education that equips persons to gain greater control, individually and collectively, over their own lives. The '150 hour' experiment provides the classic example. Connections can here be made with the learning activities of social movements, as in the case of the Italian feminist movement in connection with the '150 hour' 'monographic' courses. A more general form of AEL also has potential to connect with the efforts of movements and NGOs engaged in transforming relations of production and distribution – based on questioning what is being produced,

for what purpose and how – that we find in the 'social creation' work in Italy and the Rural University in Spain. One sees connections between this type of holistic education and the participatory citizenship concerns of those engaged in the various social movements, with their learning activities, in Spain, Italy and Portugal (e.g., the *Anti-Troika* and *Indignados* movements). There are also affinities in the quest for social participation in learning for the participatory budget, taken up in cities such as Seville. This is all part of an attempt towards 'democracy from below', the kind of democracy coveted by many in all three countries following their emergence from states of totalitarianism, be it the first dictatorship in Spain, to which the Second Republic reacted with its range of activities, including community theatre, the fall of Fascism in Italy, a catalyst for Capitini's bottom-up grassroots democracy learning activities, the Franco regime, the end of which led to numerous activities involving regional and popular cultures, and the 'Carnations' Revolution' in Portugal.

Alberto Melo's (1985) statement, reproduced above, about AEL and popular education in Portugal captures the spirit in which the flourishing of learning activities occurred, emphasising what the people had in abundance as they were conceived as actors and not simply cogs or passive recipients in a system they simply had to fit into. In attempting to be 'bottom-up', this approach projected the learners as subjects, people capable of engaging with and being protagonists in a system that they themselves rendered dynamic.

Outward manifestations permitted by the climate of these countries, commonly and perhaps loosely described as 'Mediterranean', have played an important part. Reference has been made to the Spanish *fiesta*, which highlights contextual and specific communal identities, and to its potential for conversion into a participatory educational experience. *Fiesta* and the *Semana Santa* (Holy Week) activities are a recurring feature in not only Spain but also Italy and Portugal, besides Italy's neighbour, Malta. They provide ideal contexts for outward communal participatory education that go beyond the strictly religious or spiritual. The idea inferred from Bofill (1985) is that one builds pedagogically on what captures the people's imagination and what Antonio Gramsci calls the 'popular creative spirit'.

This is all in keeping with a vision of AEL for a much coveted participatory democracy, aspirations for which are nowadays expressed against a scenario marked by financial crises and impositions by the Troika and other powerful international institutions. We would also add here the often perceived loss of faith in political parties. It is from these situations, as well as mobilisations and manifestations of the 'popular creative spirit', that alternative concepts and attitudes emerge. Some of these concepts represent a fusion between ideas deriving from within and others from without, including the 'periphery' – ideas from former Spanish and Portuguese colonies, such as Latin America, flow inversely with regard to the pattern ('centre-semi-periphery-periphery') described by Santos. Admittedly, however, there is nothing that is straightforward and unidirectional in the flow of cultural experiments and ideas. A great degree of hybridisation occurs along the way.

We witness hybridisation taking the form of a fusion of ideas emanating from different places. For instance, one notices the potential for fusion, regarding Italian AEL, between Freirean precepts and those deriving from Don Lorenzo Milani (Borg, Cardona, and Caruana 2013). The two critical pedagogues are often mentioned in the same breath. They both provide a focus on education with an ethical commitment to the oppressed. They encourage a social justice-oriented process of teaching and learning that emphasises the collective and not simply the individualistic and atomistic dimensions of learning that often emerge from the hegemonic LLL discourse. They both emphasise a process whereby

people learn to exercise their citizenship rights as social actors rather than be governed at a distance through self-censorship and other socially-instilled techniques ('governmentality') (Mayo 2007). Furthermore, though of great relevance for a non-confessional education, their ideas have religious overtones, Liberation Theology overtones in Freire's case. They provide radical readings of religious texts indicating a 'preferential option for the poor' and their ways of reading the word and the world. They therefore provide pedagogical material for Catholic-inspired AEL, a common feature in Italy, Portugal and Spain, which helps render the religious-inspired institutions or organisations concerned not monolithic but sites of struggle (Grech and Mayo 2014). Milani and Freire have proved inspirational for Catholic-inspired, progressive educational (AEL included) initiatives[23], enabling them to serve as a counterweight to such conservative, Catholic-oriented, organisations as *Opus Dei*, strongly present in all three countries.

Interestingly, Milani's influence extends beyond Italy to be also felt in Spain, where, in 1982, the *Movimiento de Renovación Pedagógica de Educadores Milanianos* (Milanian Educators' Movement of Pedagogical Innovation) was founded. [24] (Batini, Mayo, and Surian 2013). This is an offshoot of the movement of pedagogical renovation mentioned in the Spain review, which allows for fusions between Spanish, Italian and other ideas, including those from the global south (e.g. Freirean). A similar fusion between Spanish traditions and Brazilian ones occurred with respect to the Participatory Budget, all part of the process of 'reinventing experiments' rather than simply adopting them cargo-cult style. These fusions are part and parcel of the nature of the pedagogical ideas emerging from Southern Europe. They can inspire AEL approaches that serve as antidotes to the mainstream discourse.

Conclusion

This paper sought to foreground initiatives from Southern Europe, indicating their richness and variety, which, in our view, deserve greater treatment in the education literature than is the case at present. The most interesting radical initiatives are probably, as indicated, those occurring on the margins, outside the boundaries of state- and EU-funded programmes, including non-instrumental projects. In our view, highlighting these grassroots experiences would enhance the field's international scope, rendering it more richly diverse in range of provision than the current homogenising mantras and measuring yardsticks would suggest. Many of these flourished in reaction to years of cultural imposition and subordination. However, even in so-called liberal bourgeois periods, as is the case at present in all three countries, the quest for foreign investment and to create the infrastructure for the generation of foreign exchange can lead to occasional clampdowns, through funding cuts and other pressures, to bring projects in line with the dominant discourse.

We have seen how even the interim military government that replaced the dictatorship in Portugal to pave the way for civilian rule feared that in sponsoring a popular programme it would be providing people with a weapon that could eventually be wielded against it. Fears such as these provide all the more reason to suspect governments' willingness to accept, nowadays, the EU's 'safe' policy guidelines, thus providing evidence to suggest that innovative emancipatory initiatives occur best outside state control. It is from these sorts of initiatives, in these three countries, that the best lessons can be learnt for democratic grassroots-oriented AEL processes.

Notes

1. We include learning in addition to education to recognise the strong learning dimension that occurs in a variety of activities including those geared towards social change in the three countries. This applies primarily but not exclusively to learning in social movements, an aspect of adult learning that cannot be left out of a discussion such as this.
2. The State is often seen in its more relational aspect, to be discussed below with regard to Italy and the Factory Councils.
3. An EU member state since the inception of the EEC – the European Economic Community, which eventually evolved into the European Community and finally the European Union.
4. Portugal is on the Atlantic but is said to share a Mediterranean culture.
5. Democracy has a particular resonance in these three countries, which, lest we forget, have emerged from recent and not so recent histories of totalitarianism.
6. This provided stark contrasts with Northern countries and the 'elective affinities' between capitalist development and their Protestant ethic.
7. Eurostat news release, Euro-indicators, 8 January 2014**.**
8. Eurostat news release, Euro-indicators, 8 January 2014. And yet the earlier neoliberal government of Felipe Gonzales (four terms in office until 1996) was seen as the most vibrant economic country in the EU, with their banking industry expanding in investment inside and outside Spain.
9. At 4% against the EU's 8.7% in 2000.
10. The long-term unemployed make up approximately 9.3%, more than a half of the unemployment rate in 2013 and far ahead of the long-term unemployment rate of the European Union (5.1%) (http://www.pordata.pt)
11. Sicily (13. 9%), Sardinia (13.3%) and the Campania (12.9%) (*Correspondent* 2010).
12. EC press release regarding Early School leavers (http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-324_en.htm).
13. Accessed *Noi Italia* portal (http://noi-italia2013en.istat.it/index.php?id=55&user_100ind_pi1[id_pagina]=727).
14. The country's calculated landmass, excluding the independent states of the Vatican and San Marino, is 301,336 sq km. It consists of the mainland and islands (http://demoistatit/pop2013/index1_ehtml). Population density reached a peak in 2010 of 200 inhabitants per km² (ISTAT, 2011, 1).
15. A commission to study and address the future of education in Italy: Report on the Future of Education in Italy (http://www.ebinfop.it/documenti/files%5CSommario.pdf).
16. I am indebted to Professor Anna Maria Piussi, University of Verona, for this point.
17. According to 2013 data (http://wwwinept), Portugal had 1,042,730,110,427,301 inhabitants living in 9,200,092,000 km2 (http://wwwdgterritoriopt) The population density was of 1145 individuals per km2.
18. *Que se Lixe a Trioka!* is responsible for the organisation of the largest demonstrations that have occurred since the Democratic Revolution in 1974. The Troika refers to the tripartite committee led by the European Commission involving the European Central Bank and the IMF, responsible for organising loans to the Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Cyprus governments. The long-term unemployed make up approximately 9.3%, more than a half of the unemployment rate in 2013 and far ahead of the long-term unemployment rate of the European Union (5.1%) (http://www.pordata.pt).
19. Although the idea of a mass literacy campaign on the Cuban model was renounced after the removal of the leftist elements from power in the events from July to November, 1975 (Melo 1985, 41).
20. Spain has a surface of 505 988 km2. Its population is 46 507 800 inhabitants, and the density is around 92 inhabitants per km2 (Data from the National Institute of statistics (www Inees))
21. See http://www.plataformarural.org/
22. The major issue here concerns languages and social inclusion. For instance, in Spain nowadays, many AEL schools offer Spanish or other official languages, depending on the territory. One contrast lies in the immigrants' countries of origin. Though sharing with others the influx of Eastern European, sub-Saharan African and Middle Eastern migrants, former colonial powers

such as Spain and Portugal also absorb immigrants from their former colonies. The language factor is less of an AEL assimilation issue in this regard. This is hardly the case with Italy.
23. We envisage Pope Francis (2015) having similar effects today with regard to social justice and sustainable development.
24. In 2012 it had 71 members, 219 regular subscriptions and 1085 readers of their *Educar (NOS)* journal.

Acknowledgments

We are greatly indebted to Godfrey Baldacchino and Carlos Alberto Torres for their help in sharpening our argument and its exposition; they read different drafts of the manuscript. We also thank the two anonymous reviewers for their comments, especially Reviewer 1 who pushed us to deal in a nuanced manner with certain issues we raised. There is a whole list of people who we need to thank for commenting on earlier drafts or abstracts or who clarified certain points: Carmel Borg, Eugenio-Enrique Cortez-Ramirez, Antonia Darder, Leona English, Linda Herrera, Anne Hickling Hudson, Licinio Lima, Carly Manion, Andrè Elias Mazawi, Alberto Melo, Fiorenzo Parziale, Anna Maria Piussi, Daniel Schugurensky, Michele Schweisfurth, Ronald G. Sultana and Alessio Surian. Any remaining shortcomings are our responsibility.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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