

Papers on

- **Innovative approaches to promotion, marketing and outreach in adult learning**
- **New trends in widening participation**

**University
of Minho**

Innovations outside the formal system.
New forms of promoting adult learning in Portugal
by
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Introduction

Adult education as a field of practice is characterised by diversity and in recent times it has shown an important enlargement (Canário, 1999). In this context, school and some institutions of the third sector that have been developing formal educational activities still have a relevant role. Yet, what is defined as “recurrent education” (second chance education) has shown some bias from aims initially defined as a result of structural problems of school and the schooling system in Portugal. Moreover, the national agency for adult education and training, which was recently extinguished, proposed some formal educational programs that have been implemented both by governmental and non-governmental organisations. Though, these activities are not relevant in number of adults that take part. On the other hand, adult education and training courses as well as formal accreditation of prior learning acquired started not long ago have to be emphasised and can even be very successful in the future; nevertheless, these schemes don't represent an effort strong enough to solve educational and cultural problems of our society.

In the present situation, other institutions than school, popular associations¹ among them, are having an important role in the development of non-formal education. Therefore, innovative forms of conceiving, organising and implementing activities have been established, new ways of encouraging the rise of significant adult learning and to foster democracy as well. When we analyse these last thirty years of popular associations history and examine adult education activities that took place, we can observe that these institutions underwent great changes. These shifts were mainly due to social and cultural problems faced by our country as well as to the interference (most of times the lack of interference) of the State in this particular field of

¹ Although there is a discussion about the designation and nature of popular associations made by several authors like Lima (1984) and Norbeck (1984), by this expression we mean “democratic associations for development” identified by Afonso (1989:82). These organisations were created by popular initiative and are characterised by the promotion of specific symbols and codes, supported by institutions like the State, the Church or relevant local actors. In this text a distinction is made between non-profit making associations (voluntary organisations or non-governmental organisations that provide several kinds of social cultural, recreational and sports activities, among others, for people of any age) and charitable institutions (non-governmental organisations able to make contracts, protocols, agreements, etc. with the State to provide care provision, for instance elderly care, kindergarten, leisure activities for youngsters, etc.).

practice. Consequently, the development of adult education in popular associations has searched for solving local cultural and social problems and in many situations initiatives were characterised by diversity.

From the Democratic Revolution of the 25th of April up until the middle 80's, popular associations were very active achieving literacy campaigns and other national programs, political education activities, community development, popular education, etc. (see Melo & Benavente, 1978; Silva, 1990, and Silva & Rothes, 1998). These activities were aimed to involve people in formal and non-formal education, but were in many cases quite similar. At those times, popular associations were understood as interesting contexts to develop such activities, as their structure was less rigid than school; therefore, initiatives achieved could mix traditional educational contents and pedagogical methods with popular culture, sports and local development strategies among others. Besides, these programs were mainly based on amateur and voluntary work of their most motivated members.

In spite of the fact that some popular associations are still leading initiatives like these developed in the 70's and middle 80's, in the last decade specific shifts originated changes in pedagogical structure, contents, methods, assessment, etc. of educational activities for adults. As a result, one could notice a relevant enlargement of the fields in which these initiatives occurred. For instance, community and local development, but also multicultural education, the defence of ethnic minorities, the preservation of environment or historical heritage programs carried out were the other side of the mirror of Portuguese social and cultural problems.

Such enlargement was the first step for the professionalization process that a large number of these institutions has started. Educational activities proposed are now based on needs felt locally but are identified by the use of sophisticated research techniques. Problems are overtaken by professionals, as volunteers have become more and more difficult to find. Another relevant conquest is the fact that popular associations have diversified their funding sources, by applying to specific funding programs of our State or the European Union. These changes originated a more accurate analysis of educational problems, owing to a serious identification of needs and the development of relevant activities, while it also involved an important preoccupation with evaluation and assessment oriented by budget rules.

Initiatives implemented are still aimed to enlarge the number of adults and to favour social justice just like it happened in the past. Nevertheless, adult education is being led by attentive professionals and managers that care for their social and cultural obligations. Besides, such

activities are not really promoting participation and democracy as they are mostly based on vocational training.

Even if non-formal adult education shows different contents, pedagogical approaches, it was affected by this growing need of solving economic and social problems that we are facing nowadays. In the words of Maria Glória Gohn, networks of inclusion of those excluded from work have been settled by non-governmental organisations all around the world and the enlargement of participation in educational and vocational training activities is a reality in our days (Gohn, 1999:87). Actually it is possible to find an important number of vocational training and training for the job courses that are intended to favour employability. Consequently, the link of non-formal and formal education to economy is being made and the need of developing adults' skills and qualification is being strongly emphasised in politicians speeches (see Melo et al., 1998 e 2001).

Despite this active third sector, that some even call civil society, and the fact that popular associations could become important partners in the democratisation of democracy, one may not find a large number of researches on non-formal adult education activities. Except from Licínio C. Lima studies (Lima, 1984, 1986 and 1990, among others), there seems to be a diversified network of initiatives that are not been analysed and discussed, what took Rui Canário to argue that one can notice a "silent literature" in this field, mostly based on unpublished reports (Rui Canário [*in* Lima & Oliveira, 1994: 52-54]). Therefore, non-formal adult education happens but it is not widely acknowledge by educators, social workers or people in general. To fill in this absence as well as to understand non-formal adult education in popular associations, the Popular Initiated Adult Education research was developed from 1997 to 2002. This project was a relevant tool to identify and to analyse innovative activities in a field of practice that some thought was slumbering. And it was in popular associations that these activities have sprung, those that we wish to discuss in this text.

General interpretation on data gathered

As we referred before, popular associations have been considered fundamental in the promotion of democracy and education. These institutions have strong traditions in popular education and have developed a wide range of educational activities and care provision in local communities. Showing different features and objectives they themselves have changed over the last years. The establishment of these institutions was most of the times the result of popular initiative and they are strong instruments in the promotion of non-formal education

and democracy (Norbeck, 1984). However in these *late modern* times they are facing new challenges. Apart from the historical lack of funding and technical resources, one of the main problems faced is related to promoting the participation of individuals in local communities and the processes to ensure the continuation of this involvement. Trying to review practices and to rethink the relationship between the State and civil society, Lima (2001:3) argues that 'Most popular associations now appear to be facing a crisis'.

Bearing this in mind, a research was defined to identify and analyse educational processes initiated by adults in different social and cultural areas. To achieve these goals, the "Popularly Initiated Adult Education Project" was established. Its main objectives were the identification and analysis of non-formal education as well as innovative ways of devising, commencing and carrying out training, in which participants did the organising themselves or, at least, played an active role in various areas such as selecting goals and contents, creating or adapting learning methods and strategies, producing their own materials, establishing working and assessment rules, among others (Guimarães, Silva & Sancho, 1998:49).

This research has led to a national inquiry to institutions or projects that developed educational, social and cultural interventions for and by adults. Three hundred and fifty questionnaires were sent in January 1998 and eighty-two were answered. A *forum* was held in September 1998 in which 48 institutions presented innovative adult education initiatives and four case studies of innovative activities were made in four different popular associations².

Institutions inquired were most of time the result of local group practices. People having a political, social, cultural or educational role at a local level that wanted to face new educational and social challenges made up these groups. The institutions were mostly voluntary organisations/non-profit making associations and charitable institutions, founded after 1986 and structured by boards of directors, fiscal departments and a general assemblies. Due to their nature and structure, these institutions were in many cases spaces of socialisation and active participation from their most motivated members. Organisational problems, needs and decisions were discussed and the implementation of solutions was the result of global efforts.

These institutions organised different kinds of activities in the adult education field like training, teaching and local development as well as leisure time initiatives as we can observe in the table below. Local authorities, mostly town halls, funded activities, as well as the

² These case studies were developed in four popular associations in the North of Portugal located in the following towns: Viana do Castelo (Rocha, 2000), Guimarães (Silva, 2000), Esposende (Sancho, 2000) and Porto (Rothes, 2000). In this text we will discuss the case study from Viana do Castelo (Rocha, 2000).

European Union programmes and the Portuguese Employment and Vocational Training Institute. It was possible to identify the importance given by some of these institutions to set a community development programme, pragmatically conceived and less politically understood as funding to activities was regulated by the State or the European Union (Guimarães, Silva & Sancho, 1998:94).

Table 1 – Main activities developed by popular associations inquired

Main activities developed by popular associations inquired	N
Education and training initiatives	27
Leisure time initiatives	24
Care provision	13
Development of programs (national or European Union programs)	10
Sports	6
Local development	5
Editions and publication of relevant studies	5
Building up of sports hall, kindergarten, training rooms, etc	4
Other activities	2

The majority of these institutions had volunteer board members (table 2) but had a relevant number of paid animators and technical advisors (table 3) as well as in-house training staff (table 4). In some situations paid external training staff joined activities as voluntary one. In fact, one could notice a tendency to have 'professional' popular associations, especially the largest organisations that provided activities for children, youngsters and elderly. In some cases, their members saw these organisations as enterprises providing services for clients and forgetting some adult education principles.

Table 2 – Paid and non-paid boards members

Paid and non-paid boards members	N
Popular associations that had non-paid boards members	38
Popular associations that had paid board members	5
Popular associations that didn't answer to this question	5

Table 3 – Paid animators and technical advisers

Paid animators and technical advisers	N
Popular associations that had paid animators and technical advisers	25
Popular associations that didn't have paid animators and technical advisers	17
Popular associations that didn't answer to this question	6

Table 4 – In-house training staff

In-house training staff	N
Popular associations that had in-house training staff	20

Popular associations that didn't have in-house training staff	22
Popular associations that didn't answer to this question	6

Most institutions showed educational proposals that were based on adults' wish for social and cultural transformation. Courses, projects, competitions, theatre, music and vocational training were achieved with the purpose of raising awareness and developing specific skills. Emphasis was put on combination between theory and practice and the promotion of trainee's action. The aims were the development of skills and attitudes and the improvement of activities towards the workplace. These institutions were responsible for the definition of goals and contents, together with other institutions or with trainees, most of these objectives pragmatically (and not politically) defined (Guimarães, Silva & Sancho, 1998:95).

Activities were promoted by popular associations or in partnership with others, within the framework of national or international programmes, at a local or regional level, most of the times on a daily basis. Town halls, Employment and Professional Training Institute and local committees for adult education provided funding. In fact, this research showed a complex role developed by popular associations, as a strong link was being built with education, training and employment policies. One could observe an effort for seeking support and public funding, but also institutions' legitimisation and formal recognition.

The expected outcomes were the encouragement of trainees to take part in training, to preserve local heritage, to make changes at a local level, etc., but the decision-making process was centralised in institutions themselves, most of them in their boards of directors. Trainees were young adults, women, long-term unemployed³ and people looking for their first job or just individuals seeking for knowledge and skills. The trainers had previous experience in the kind of activities developed and others had specific academic qualifications or certified pedagogical competence (Guimarães, Silva & Sancho, 1998: 97).

An innovative non-formal adult education activity: comments on a case study

Apart from the enquiry, four case studies were developed in order to analyse the pedagogical structure and the participation of trainees in the definition, management and evaluation of initiatives. One of the case studies was devoted to The Black Sheep Course, a training activity of a third age university. Its main aims were the establishment of a free school, where the trainees could choose the lectures they wanted to join, with no absence regime or marks;

³ People unemployed for more than one year.

and the existence of a space where trainees could communicate their learning experiences and shared their way.

Another one was the Cloth, Ceramics, Wood and Glass Decoration and Painting Course. This training was the result of the co-operation between a popular association and the local committee for adult education. It was meant to teach people to paint and to decorate several materials like cloth, ceramics, wood and glass but also to train them on basic art skills.

The third case study was In the Inside Margins Project. It was stressed on the need of fighting unemployment, due to bankruptcy of local enterprises, dismissal of workers, geographical mobility and to health problems suffered by many long-term unemployed adults. Its aims were to develop new possibilities of knowledge based on personal identity of each adult, to respect personal and social differences, to search for equality and social justice, to learn how to share family responsibilities and to build each adults' life project based on awareness and participation.

The fourth case study is the one we would like to present due to innovations in pedagogical terms but also other forms of conception, promotion and outreach adults in initiatives developed by popular associations in Portugal (see Rocha, 2000).

The Child and Youth Animator's Training was implemented by a popular association in a small town of the North of Portugal, Viana do Castelo. It was an initiative of the Popular University Project to accomplish the needs identified in other action-research projects of this organisation. A major importance was given to previous work implemented with children, young adults and adults, the existence of social and economic development strategies established before by this organisation, reflection and assessment of the educational processes developed in further educational activities, the need of building up of innovative and action research activities involving the local community, as well as the importance of promoting solidarity and other social dimensions of learning among all adults involved in this training.

In this context, the main training aims were to support local communities in the establishment of educational and leisure activities, to train young adults and adults in the building up of educational and leisure initiatives, to promote the development of educational spaces, to learn how to develop educational and leisure activities for (and with) children, young people and adults and to learn how to participate in social and cultural terms.

This training involved the development of three courses in 1998, for 30 persons (ten persons each course): twenty-six were women and four were men, aged from 18 to 42 years old. Each course included 300 hours of training, both theoretical and practical sessions. The main

contents were: Psychology, Communication Skills, Project Conception and Design, Social and Cultural Animation, Health, Music Expression, Plastic Arts, Multimedia Techniques (including the use of computers), Animation and Games, Library Animation and Sports. These contents were selected by popular association staff, the local community, animators and trainers, in a participatory action research process.

The funding was mainly from the *Subprograma Integrar – Medida 2*, a program of the European Social Fund (European Union) and the Portuguese Ministry of Labour and Welfare. Apart from contents and the modular structure of the course, we can still find other non-formal aspects. For instance, the diffusion of the course was made through the local press and radio, by the distribution of leaflets and personal contacts. The selection of trainees was a different one. Adults filled a form and a questionnaire and interviews were also made. Long term unemployed and individuals with low professional qualification were favoured.

The selection of the trainers was made according to the pedagogical experience and their interest in participatory action research. As a result, the approach was innovative as active pedagogical methods were privileged in order to promote participation, socialisation, and relationship between trainees and trainer. Flexibility of space and time was also a relevant dimension. The curriculum and the possibility of adjusting the contents to the needs of the trainees were also important, as well as leisure activities developed during the training.

In terms of the decision making process, popular association representatives were leading but the different groups involved were asked to analyse training activities developed and pedagogical changes could be introduced in the contents, methods, etc. As an example, assessment and mentoring were frequent and common activities. Trainers, trainees and the popular association staff did the internal assessment based on action-reflection. External assessment occurred too. In this context pedagogical changes were allowed.

Apart from the non-formal aspects, some other innovations have to be referred. In general, the training approach was different from teaching. For instance, this training was an answer to specific needs expressed both by individuals and the group. Aims, contents selected as well as the structure of the course based on modules led to the existence of a different attitude among trainers, trainees and popular association staff.

Partnerships developed by the different institutions involved in this initiative showed the importance of the involvement of the local community in whole process, revealing a different educational approach based on participatory action research processes.

Some concluding remarks

Data gathered showed that non-formal education developed by popular associations included different practices. In spite of the importance of the State's educational initiatives for adults, other activities were being achieved. When compared to traditional supply, new contents, approaches and methods were being developed outside the formal system.

As a result, this research project showed that new ways of thinking adult education seemed to be emerging. Different educational activities were described and a new pedagogy was arising in popular associations. Among other pedagogical principles, one can stress the importance of the relationship between theory and practice and a strong wish of linking training to the local labour market. Also local problems were most of times the basis for knowledge and a socially useful curriculum was a concern, even if sometimes aims of these actions were not always clear. In some initiatives it was possible to find a link between the educational process and economy, especially those funded by the Employment and Professional Training Institute and other European Union programmes. Relevance of self-organisation by learners was also important evidence.

When compared to teaching, these initiatives mentioned in this text, in particular the case study presented, were less structured, oriented to the promotion of specific tasks and skills. Flexible timing and different spaces for non-formal education were being established and people tried to solve locally based needs that couldn't be supplied by the formal system.

While popular associations represent flexible learning environments closer to adults' educational needs, they also seem to be facing some dangers. One of the most significant was the fact that these institutions developed different ways of participating in the definition of educational and social policies, but new strategies of social and organisational dependence are being built. Partnerships are established with several public departments, from social welfare to formal adult education. Apart from these facts, application to national or European Union programmes become fundamental to their survival. Finding funding is one of the most important tasks achieved. Their projects and social recognition depend on competence to present credible proposals and to find new areas to intervene, even if these are traditional welfare state sectors, like elderly and kindergarten care or leisure time activities.

Surprisingly, and even if an important number of activities may be found, adult non-formal education has not really been considered in the national educational plan of the Ministry of Education, nor has it been considered a necessary piece in the democratisation of democracy (Lima, 1996:292). In spite of being highly diversified, initiatives don't belong to a public set of provision that could increasingly serve the evolving and changing learning needs

of all groups. On the other hand, adult non-formal education has not been seen as an important area and it could easily become a fragmented sector, depending on different orientations, on national and European Union policies and funding programmes. Even if total control is not necessary and not acceptable, we believe that the State should take its social and educational responsibilities, especially when a sector like adult education with strong impact in democratisation, promotion of participation and human rights as well as the establishment of a fair society is being considered (Lima, 1996:293). The establishment of a flexible network that may combine the existing formal activities and non-formal ones is needed. Though it is important that this 'new' system may keep the emphasis on social and cultural transformation.

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