

## **ADULT EDUCATION IN GREECE**

### **Abstract**

The central aim of this article is to analyze the current situation of adult education in Greece. The article focuses on the following points: a) the degree of participation in programmes of continuing professional training and general adult education courses, b) the quality and the outcomes of the adult education provision in Greece, and c) the governmental policies and initiatives of adult education which relate to these points. This national study is compared with relevant developments at international level and is connected to the broader socioeconomic conditions which have an impact to the developments of the field of adult education. The article begins with the examination of the international trends in adult education within the current socioeconomic context and then it proceeds to the analysis of the situation of adult education in Greece.

### **The international context**

The orientation of adult education from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it was first acknowledged as a social institution, to the middle of the 1980's, when the globalization impact became apparent, did not focus largely to professional training. Assuredly there were training programmes targeting to employed and unemployed citizens but most of the organized activities aimed to the dissemination of general education and the development of personal and social change (UNESCO 1997). The main idea was to provide the trainees with the necessary input in order to critically comprehend the conditions of their life and to assist them towards their emancipation and participation in the social, economical and cultural environment. Thus, adult education as an institution contributed in many countries – and in some of them in a decisive way – to the development of active citizens. It is not a coincidence that adult education was called during these days “liberal education” (Jarvis 2002· Swedish

National Council of Adult Education 2003).

However, since the middle of the 1980's the situation changed rapidly due to the impact of the globalization phenomenon. The unbounded international commerce, the free movement of capital and the escalation of international business competition lead the national economies to a continuous inquiry for methods of increasing productivity while at the same time unemployment was striking harshly a larger percentage of the general population. Within this framework vocational training is emerging as one of the most significant means to promote economical development and intensification in the "use" of human resources.

The Treaty of Lisbon (also known as the Reform Treaty) in 2000 is one of the most distinctive examples of an international strategy regarding the connection of vocational training with economical development and promotion of employment. The European Social Fund (ESF) is the main funding resource of the European Union towards the realization of this strategy. More specifically the ESF's main aim is to *"to provide the citizens the necessary employment skills to improve their self-esteem and their ability to adjust in the labor market"* (European Commission, 1998).

Since mid 1980s, a rapid development of vocational training is noticeable all over the world – especially in the European and the other developed countries. At the same time a significant decrease of "liberal", humanistic oriented adult education is reported (Merriam and Caffarella 1999· Rubenson 2000).

Nevertheless, we have to recognize that despite the world's turn to vocational training, in many developed countries a lot of liberal adult education activities are implemented especially in the fields of active citizenship, critical thinking, training of socially marginalized groups, and there is always a live movement for the fighting of illiteracy in third world countries (UNESCO 2003).

The aforementioned trend for the development of inquiry and thus educational activities beyond vocational training is also apparent in the research projects that were

implemented internationally in the 1990's (UNESCO 1999) and it is furthermore shown in the decade of 2000 to the titles and the content of the research papers published in six international journals in the adult education field (Karalis 2008)<sup>1</sup>. More specifically, during 2001-2005, from the 559 papers which were published only 82 (14,7%) are related to vocational training, while the rest of the research inquiry is focused to the theoretical investigation for the identity, the mission, the institutions and the policies of adult education as well as the training methods and the characteristics of the trainees and the trainers.

<b>Paper categories</b>	<b>Number of papers</b>	<b>%</b>
1. Identification of the field of adult education – theoretical perspectives.	191	34,2
2. Institutions and policies	145	25,9
3. Training methods, design and evaluation of training programmes. Group dynamics.	95	17,0
4. Vocational training – Connection between the training and the development process.	82	14,7
5. Characteristics of trainers and trainees.	46	8,2
Total	559	100,0

**Table 1: Papers in six international journals**

**from 2001 to 2005 (Karalis 2008)**

## **The emergence of adult education in Greece**

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1 Adult Education Quarterly, International Journal of Lifelong Education, Journal of Vocational Education and Training, Studies in Continuing Education, Journal of Transformative Education, Studies in the Education of Adults.

In Greece during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in contrast with what had happened in other countries in Europe (especially in central and northwestern countries), adult education was not an institution inscribed in the collective culture and the social practice of the citizens. Up to 1980, the activities of adult education were in a “fetal” condition – related mainly with illiteracy and extension education (Vergidis 2005), while the public discussion and the scientific inquiry about the process of education beyond the formal school system was simply nonexistent. Even in the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (2002) the Greek citizens who were attending non formal adult education programmes were slightly exceeding 1.2% of the population which is considered as the productive age (i.e. 25-64 years) within the month that the research took place, while the European Union average for the same age group was 8.5% (Commission des Communautés Européennes, 2003, p. 25). This phenomenon is justified by some researchers (Vergidis 2005 · Karalis 2006 · Kokkos 2005, 2008) due to five interrelated factors: a) the fact that until the fall of the dictatorship (1967-1974) in 1974 there were long periods of political dominance by conservative powers, a situation that was not fertile for the development of activities towards the emancipation of citizens, b) the weakness of the social and syndicate movements throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Greece, a condition which contributed to the deferral of the need for educational activities by the society, c) the fact that the vast majority of Greek businesses are family managed, have a traditional character and low competitiveness and therefore little attention is given to human resource investment, d) the dysfunctional characteristics of the state organizations that are responsible for adult education (centralization, bureaucratization, low service quality), and e) the low quality and inefficiency of the institutions which provide adult education services.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that during the period 1981 – 1985 some interesting developments occurred which still have an impact to what is going on in the field. In 1981, Greece for the first time in modern history elects a social democratic government which sets as a priority the establishment of Popular Education as a social institution aiming specifically to the personal development of the citizens through their conscious and energetic participation to the social and political milieu and to the creative use of leisure time. During

that period 350 Education Centres operate all over Greece. As it is shown in Table 2, the number of participants in Popular Education was increasing rapidly: from 69.594 in 1980 they reached an average of 213.000 in 1981-1985. Thus, Popular Education became by far the largest area of adult education in Greece. The second area where participation increased was extension education (80.000 participants in 1986), while the area of continuing vocational training was absorbing a small part of the total trainee number (in 1986, only 25.000 people participated in professional training programmes in business in the private and the public sector as well as in programmes of training unemployed people – see Vergidis 2005). In parallel, the funding of Popular Education increased significantly (from 150.000.000 GDR or 440.205 Euro in 1980, the funding goes to 3.245.377.261 GDR or 9.524.218 Euro in 1984 – Table 2), mainly due to the fact that ESF started funding the programmes. From these funds the largest part which concerned adult education was given to Popular Education (55%) through the General Secretariat of Popular Education (Pesmatzoglou 1987, 278).

<b>Year</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Funding (in Euro)</b>
1980	69.594	440.205
1981	213.476	7.929.626
1982	265.567	6.065.726
1983	197.896	8.142.221
1984	210.000	9.524.218
1985	178.068	8.683.358
1981-1985 average	213.001	

**Table 2: Participants and funding in popular education in the years 1980 – 1985:** (Karalis and Vergidis 2006, 51)

At the same time some innovative actions were realized. These interrelated actions aimed to improve the quality of the Popular Education institution. During these years the General Secretariat of Popular Education was founded and several high qualified people were

employed to its departments. The Secretariat also recruited and placed in all the prefectures Popular Education Advisors. The advisors had an average age of 30-35 years and their responsibilities included the study of the training needs of the local population and the coordination of educational activities. Moreover, the General Secretariat founded and funded the Centre for Studies and Self-directed Learning which undertook the training of the staff members of Popular Education, published the journal "Self-directed Learning" and a number of books and organized a series of international conferences.

Nevertheless this short period of innovation was not sufficient to create great quality changes. One of the most significant problems was the dysfunctional public sector, that was "suffocating" every innovative initiative (i.e. the Ministry of Education which exercised authority over the Secretariat, the Prefectures who employed the Popular Education Advisors, etc.) and the traditional teacher-centered attitudes which fostered for decades the adult educators of that period. On the other hand, the aforementioned innovations which incorporated the spirit of social change that prevailed those days in the country, diffused within the framework of Popular Education radical approaches like the theories of Paulo Freire and the critical theory of the School of Frankfurt. The apex of all the activities was a visit by Paulo Freire in Greece with whom the staff of popular education discussed the implementation of his ideas.

### **The "stone age"**

However, as of 1986 the situation changed dramatically. ESF altered its priorities, gradually focusing them to vocational training, especially after 1989 when the First Community Support Framework (know also as "Delor I") was initiated. The Greek governmental policy followed literally all the directions of the ESF in order not to lose its funding and to denote its European orientation. At the same time the state support towards Popular Education gradually stopped due to the growing conservatism of the Greek society and its political life – a result rooted in the beginning of the engagement with the process of

globalization. This disappointing fact had as a consequence the disablement of the Councils of Popular Education and the termination of the operations of the above mentioned Centre for Study and Self-directed Learning. Thus, alongside with the quantitative reduction of the “liberal” adult education, all the quality institutions that were aiming to the theoretical inquiry and advancement of the field were also damaged. Therefore, adult education in Greece was completely cut off from all the international developments. Simultaneously, until 1999, the participants have decreased to 15.886 and funding was only one third (1/3) of what it used to be during the years 1981 – 1985 (Karalis and Vergidis 2006, 51-55).

Hence, since 1986 we experience the start of an infertile period for liberal adult education which lasted for about 15 years and had the following characteristics:

- a) Continuing Vocational Training dominated the field of adult education. One strong characteristic of the era is the fact that during the period 1994-1999 the participants in this type of programmes presented an annual average of 86.229 trainees (OECD 2003, p. 16), while the same indicator for Popular Education was only 15.963 participants (Karalis and Vergidis 2006, 55).
- b) The ESF supported and imposed free market conditions in the distribution of funds, and as a result most of the continuing vocational training programmes were implemented by private and for-profit oriented organizations which had the form of companies up to the mid- 1990's and then the form of Centres of Vocational Training. In 1999 these Centres were implementing 69,4% of the total programmes of continuing vocational training while the public sector, including universities, were implementing only 20,2% (Karalis and Vergidis 2004, 183).
- c) The quality and efficiency of the provided services was at a low level. It is indicative that both UNESCO (1997, 12· 1999, 134) and OECD (2003, 40) ascertained the lack of co-ordination in educational activities and the lack of scientific and university-level activities regarding adult education in Greece.

Moreover, it was noted that there was no connection between vocational training and employment.

The delay in the development of university-level studies in adult education is revealed by the fact that until 2000 there was only one undergraduate programme related to the field (at the University of Macedonia, since 1996), one graduate programme (at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, since 1997) and a few other courses dispersed in various programmes all over Greece. Moreover, according to the records of the National Documentation Centre, until 2002 there were only three (3) doctoral dissertations implemented in the field of adult education. We should also notice an interesting outcome from a research by Sipitanou and Papaconstantinou (2004) : among 62 faculty members who taught subjects relevant to adult education in Greek Universities between 1985 and 2003 only six (6) were hired initially to teach adult education issues. The rest 56 were hired to teach courses like Pedagogy, Psychology, Sociology, Linguistics, Counseling, etc. This fact is a good indication of the arbitrary situation of the field of adult education in the Greek universities, a situation which was apparently connected with the incomplete and confused comprehension of the content and the function of the field in the Greek society.

The lack of scientific dialogue in the field is supported also by the records of the Educational Bibliography Review, a publication of the Greek Pedagogical Institute. The relevant data shows that from 1992 to 2002 only 33 scientific papers about adult education were published in Greek scientific educational journals.

Finally, the lack of the appropriate knowledge and skills characterizing the institutions and the adult educators has also being reported by two evaluation reports. The first report evaluated the Centres of Vocational Training for the years 2001-2003 and showed that their accomplishments was mediocre since in a quantitative scale of evaluation the average mark was 52.3/100 (Efstratoglou 2007, 25). The second report evaluated the national training programme of the trainers in continuing vocational education. Based on qualitative and quantitative data it was found that only a few adult educators were trained to teach adults



and as a result 6 out of 10 did not acquire a sufficient level of know-how, which led to the reproduction of the traditional teaching methods they received in the formal educational system (Kokkos 2008).

From the abovementioned data concerning the period between 1986 and the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one may conclude that adult education in Greece was a field which, contrary to what was happening in other countries, was characterized by low participation and quality as well as the absence of social and political recognition as a channel leading to social change and development.

On the other hand, it must be mentioned that some progress was made especially at the end of this period. The Hellenic Open University started its operation (1999) and offered a second chance for university studies in the adult population. Through the funds provided by the ESF for one of its secondary targets, that of social cohesion, the Schools of Secondary Chance, the Centres for Adult Education and the Parenting Schools were introduced. In addition, the Centres of Vocational Training were certified (1998) and some first translated textbooks on adult education were published within a series called “Adult Education” from a well known publisher in Greece. Finally, a lot of adult educators were developing their skills through self-directed learning activities and the practical experience they acquired as they were operating in the field. These steps were small and not interconnected. However, they became the stepping stone for a series of processes initiated in 2003 and are still active.

### **Chronic problems and new processes**

Initially, it should be stated that the problematic situation of adult education in Greece has not been transformed radically the last years. The policy of the Greek government did not show any special interest for this sector and as a result the trends of the previous decades continue to prevail. It is rather indicative that the participation of citizens of the age group 25-64 in educational activities was not over 1,9% within the month of 2006 that the research took place (Council of the European Union 2008, 33), a percentage which places

Greece in the 25<sup>th</sup> position among 27 member states of the European Union. Moreover, the public authorities are continuing to be away from every contemporary development and in some cases they even work in an inhibitive manner. Let us mention two indicative examples: a) the recent state legislation about the Schools of Second Chance imposes a learning model which is a continuation of the typical model existing in the formal school system and forces the rejection of the methods with which these Schools were operating and which were adjusted to the special characteristics of the adult learners and, b) within the national training of trainers programmes ten (10) unreasonable interventions of the public authorities concerning the educational material, the selection criteria and the evaluation system, led to the deformation and untrustworthiness of the original project (Kokkos 2008).

On the other hand, some positive trends were reinforced and the number of organizations and adult educators committed to the scientific establishment and improvement of the field's activities increased. The most important elements of the contemporary period are as follows.

Four (4) new graduate level programmes in adult education were launched in the University of Athens, the University of Macedonia, the University of Patras and the Hellenic Open University even though the number of faculty members who are specialized in the field remains low (9 persons only). We have to mention that the postgraduate programme "Adult Education" which started in 2003 at the Hellenic Open University accepts a big number of students enroll (140 students) who are already experienced adult educators or executive staff in adult education organizations. This fact is quite crucial since such quality students are enriching the programme with their expertise and at the same time they propagate through a great variety of activities the knowledge and the skills which were acquired throughout their studies.

In 2003 the first national programme (300 hours) dealing with the training of adult education trainers was initiated. A total of 250 adult trainers participated and successfully completed the first phase of the programme, while the whole project was completed in 2006-

2008 with the participation of 10.000 trainees. According to an evaluation study, which was implemented, at the end of the project 90% of the participants were in position to respond to the demands of their role as adult educators (Kokkos 2008). Simultaneously, in 2007-2008 another training programme of adult educators was implemented. This time the duration of the programme was 100 hours and 8.000 adult educators from the field of general adult education participated. We should also mention that similar programmes are also organized from time to time by the General Confederation of Labor and the Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen and Merchants.

Furthermore, in 2003 the General Secretariat of Adult Education initiated the operation of the Centers of Adult Education and the Parenting Schools which together with the Schools of Second Chance are absorbing a gradually increasing number of participants, having reached today a total of 32.000 persons (Efstratoglou and Nikolopoulou 2008). If we add to the previous number the 25.000 students of the Hellenic Open University, the 20.000 students of the programmes of Popular Education (General Secretariat of Adult Education 2008) and all those who participate in various training programmes organized by organizations in order to fight social exclusion, we may conclude that general adult education has increased significantly in the last years reaching a total of 80.000 participants.

On the other hand continuing vocational training is still absorbing almost the same number of trainees as in the previous described period. In the period 2001-2006, an average of 96.845 people attended programmes which are supervised by the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection<sup>2</sup> and it is estimated that this number escalates to 120.000 people when the trainees of other institutions are added (e.g. training organizations supervised by other ministries, other public organizations and corporate training). Thus, continuing vocational training is still occupying the largest part of the adult education activities although its ratio to the activities of general education has improved a lot in favor of the second: from 1: 0,2

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2 Data by the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection, Special Unit for the Administration of the O.P. "Employment, and Vocational Training" and Special Unit for Designing and Monitoring ESF actions.

during the period 1994-1999 to 1: 0,7 during the period 2003-2008.

Within several organizations of general adult education but also in some organizations from the field of continuing vocational training groups of adult educators are formed and try to improve the quality of the provided programmes. At the same time an increasing number of adult educators are becoming more conscious about their role and their professional identity. Moreover, books from prominent authors of the field are translated (e.g. Freire, Knowles, Shor, Schön, Jarvis, Mezirow) and the first informal groups of self-directed learning start to function examining in depth issues like the transformative learning theory, the role of critical reflection, the use of art in adult education.

### **The self-organization of the adult educators**

The ensemble of these actions resulted to the motivation of a core number of adult educators who while facing the state ignorance, felt the need to reinforce their professional identity and improve the conditions of their profession. Therefore, in 2003, the Hellenic Adult Education Association was formed as a non-governmental, non-profit organization, and set its mission to the development of the scientific and professional field of adult education, the improvement of the teaching skills of its members and the reinforcement of communication and solidarity among them.

The Association was rapidly developed. Today it has over 850 members, implements research activities and independent studies, has already organized three international conferences, facilitated several experiential learning workshops in many cities around Greece as well as specialized training programmes for trainers which emphasize in the applications of the theory of transformative learning. Moreover, it has invited and introduced to the Greek audience significant thinkers like Peter Jarvis, Jack Mezirow, Alan Rogers, Colin Griffin, Jane Thompson and Henning Olesen. The Association has also published books and 14 issues of the peer-reviewed scientific journal “Adult Education” (2004-2008). In these issues 70 papers related to adult education were presented. This number is higher than the respective number (46) of all the papers which were published the last six years in Greek journals which

host papers for adult education, including the newly published journal “Lifelong” which is published by the General Secretariat of Adult Education. The comparison depicted in Table 3, shows that the “Adult Education” Journal is generally following the international inquiry on adult education , while the rest of the Greek journals (including the “Lifelong” journal) have not been detached from the topics dominating the field in previous years. It is indicative that in these journals the topic “identification of the field – theoretical perspectives” is occupying only 8.7% of the total published work. On the contrary, in the “Adult Education” journal this topic is major (44.3%) a fact reflecting the Association’s aim to clarify the theoretical foundations of the field to its members.

<b>Paper categories</b>	<b>559 papers in six international journals (2001 – 2005)  (see Table 1)  %</b>	<b>70 papers in the journal “Adult Education” (2004-2008)  %</b>	<b>46 papers in other Greek journals (2003-2008)  %</b>
1. Identification of the field of adult education – theoretical perspectives.	34,2	<b>44,3</b>	8,7
2. Institutions and policies	25,9	<b>11,4</b>	41,3
3. Training methods, design and evaluation of training programmes. Group dynamics.	17,0	<b>27,2</b>	23,9
4. Vocational training – Connection between the training and the development	14,7	<b>5,7</b>	15,2

process.			
5. Characteristics of trainers and trainees.	8,2	<b>11,4</b>	10,9
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0

**Table 3: A comparison of the themes of papers for adult education** (Karalis 2008· Hellenic Educational Bibliography Review, “Adult Education” and “Lifelong” Journals)

However, the greatest benefit offered by the Association to its members is that it brings them together and creates the foundations for a productive dialogue among them. This process generates many co operations, networks, and action plans for the Greek adult educators and their organizations. Among them there are many who had been active in Popular Education in the years 1981-1985 and now through processes of reflection are participating in the new actions. This last fact shows that adult education movement in Greece was developing implicitly and dialectically above and beyond all the direct or indirect obstacles that it had to confront.

### **Some ideas for the future**

All of the above lead to the formation of a major question for adult education in Greece: to what extent may we consider that the field is moving towards an environment in which mindful adult educators hope to exist (i.e. to have a recognition by the society, to be supported by the state and to operate with fully trained human resource towards the emancipation of citizens and the harmonization of their life with the constantly changing economical and social reality)?

Having in mind the aforementioned processes and difficulties, it is obvious that the evolution of the field of adult education in Greece is going to be slow, spiral and will originate mainly by the efforts of independent organizations, individuals and core groups who manage to operate creatively within thorny conditions. This self-organization trend has started to function and there are indications that it is part of a broader phenomenon of the Greek society, which is slowly but steadily growing. As mentioned in an international research

(Sotiropoulos and Karamagioli 2006) the last years a growing tendency of the middle class to undertake action through structures related to what is known as “the society of citizens” or “active citizenship”, has been observed in Greece. These structures are independent non-governmental organizations aiming to satisfy the special interests of their members. This trend is the result of the broadness of the middle class, of the decadence of the political parties’ ability to intervene with efficiency and of the processes of Europeanization which supports the participation of citizens in the formation of their social life.

During the maturity process of the conditions for adult education a crucial role is given to the Hellenic Adult Education Association and to the social partners (General Confederation of Labor and the Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen and Merchants) who have already adopted a positive attitude towards the training of their members. We may learn a lot from the long tradition which has been developed in other countries – under different conditions of course – where adult education is developed not due to state interventions but due to grassroots actions, due to the initiatives undertaken by organizations of citizens and by the associations of adult educators (Jarvis 2007). Through this kind of approaches it was possible to realize, for example, the university level courses for workers in Great Britain which operate since the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the radical activities of the Highlander School in the U.S., the Antigonish movement in Canada, the Learning Cycles and the Folk Schools which for decades are important units of popular education and democratic dialogue in the Scandinavian countries, and the significant activities undertaken by the Associations of adult educators in the U.K, the U.S, Canada, South Korea, Bolivia, Ireland, etc. (Long 1996· Jarvis 2007). On the other hand we have to be patient given the special conditions of the Greek society where the “active citizenship” movement is still fragile and weak to oppose the state mechanisms (Voulgaris 2008· Mouzelis 2002).

So what one should do? Reinforce self-organization and networking. Be aware that each individual stance is important for all the adult educators. If cooperation continues to grow, if educators insist to operate with dignity, professional efficiency and continue to aim

towards the strengthening of adult learners' self-reliance through the development of critical consciousness regarding every problem they face, one may hope that adult education in Greece will continue to create cells which will contribute to the process of social progress.

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