

Franziska Semrau, Nataliya G. S. Vieira & Elisa Guida

# **Academic professionalisation in adult education: insights into study programmes in Germany, Italy and Portugal**

## **Abstract**

The three EU member states Germany, Italy, and Portugal have implemented measures of the Bologna process as a common strategy, wherefrom different situations concerning the organisation of study programmes related to adult education have developed in these three different country-specific contexts. This paper takes a closer look at the opportunities for academic professionalisation provided by university studies in adult education at the bachelor's and master's level in each country. From a structural point of view, a comparative analysis will show differences in the amount of contents related to adult education at the bachelor's level compared to the master's level. Furthermore, it will be considered which possibilities for and types of personal development exist in these degree courses.

## **Introduction**

The field of adult education is very wide and diverse. Adult educators as a group are heterogeneous, and the circumstances under which they perform their daily work vary depending on the sector they work in. This means that the specific characteristics of adult education and of the professionalisation process in that field can only be understood with regard to the social structures of a region or country, their historical development, and their political and economic surroundings (cf. Jütte & Lattke, 2014, p. 7; Nuissl, 2005, p. 48). Considering the concrete issue of academic professionalisation of adult educators from an internationally comparative point of view, this must also be taken into account (cf. Egetenmeyer & Schüßler, 2014b, p. 92).

Furthermore, a huge variety and complexity within the practical situations adult educators are confronted with can be seen. These characteristics make it impossible in the daily pedagogical practice to closely follow behavioural guidelines. There are no universal solutions for educational practice. Rather, it is characteristic that there are contradictions and antinomies which must be endured. Consequently, it is necessary for adult educators to interpret situations based on their scientific knowledge so that they are able to act adequately in these situations: 'In other words, professionals are able to put on professional glasses through which they can see situations clearly

from the perspective of adult education.' (Egetenmeyer & Käpplinger, 2011, p. 25). Professionalism in this sense means to understand and interpret daily situations and to act adequately on the basis of professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes (*ibid.*; Egetenmeyer & Schüsler, 2014a, pp. 30 ff.; Alberici & Orefice, 2006, pp. 23 ff.). Therefore, academic professionalisation in terms of academic qualification as a basis for developing professionalism is related, on the one hand, to more abstract, scientific knowledge imparted through a formal qualification, but on the other hand also to possibilities for developing personal competencies during this formal education.

This paper takes a closer look at existing opportunities for academic qualification in adult education at the bachelor's and master's level in Germany, Italy, and Portugal. The starting point for the discussion will be the contextual commonality of the Bologna Process in each of these three EU member states. A comparative analysis seeks to identify current similarities and differences in organised study programmes in the country-specific contexts. Furthermore, it will be considered which possibilities for and different types of personal development exist in these degree courses.

## **Opportunities for Academic Professionalisation in Adult Education in Germany**

With the implementation of the Bologna Process in Germany, the academic qualification for adult educators has changed from the former one-cycle diploma programmes (duration: 4.5 years) to the current two-cycle bachelor's and master's degree courses (duration: 3 plus 2 years) (*cf.* Egetenmeyer & Schüsler, 2014b, p. 93). The ways in which curricular contents were transferred from the diploma system to the new study model vary, and the change was not always an easy one (*cf.* Faulstich, Graeßner, & Walber, 2012, p. 30; Lattke, 2012, p. 53). According to statistical information from the German Rectors Conference (HRK), the vast majority of all study courses in the 2014–2015 winter term were transferred to bachelor's and master's courses (*cf.* HRK, 2014, p. 7). The research that was done for the following comparison showed a similar situation, with only one programme related to adult education finishing with a diploma degree could be identified<sup>1</sup>. However, researching the online study information pages does not clearly reveal how many German study

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1 The contents related to the German study programmes are based on the named sources and on own research, which was done using online university information pages in February 2015. These sources include the study guide of the German Institute of Adult Education (DIE) <http://www.die-bonn.de/weiterbildung/studienfuehrer/default.aspx> and the subject information system of the HRK <http://www.hochschulkompass.de/studium/studieren-in-deutschland-die-fachsuche.html>. When searching the second

courses at the bachelor's and master's level are connected to contents related to adult education, because the number of courses listed varied between 55 (DIE) and 28 (HRK) bachelor's courses and 74 (DIE) and 27 (HRK) master's courses.

Undergraduate programmes providing knowledge related to adult education in Germany are mainly named 'educational sciences' or 'pedagogy'; only few course titles include terms like adult education, lifelong learning, or extracurricular education (cf. Faulstich, Graeßner, & Walber, 2012, p. 32; Frößinger, 2010, p. 3). Within this range of labels for academic programmes, also diverse structures can be found in which adult education contents are organised. There are single-subject bachelor's courses in educational sciences or pedagogy in which students can concentrate in adult education (e.g. the courses offered at the universities in Chemnitz, Tübingen, and Bamberg) as well as programmes in general educational subjects without the possibility to concentrate even though adult education contents are included in the general curriculum (e.g. the bachelor's programme in pedagogy/educational sciences at Ludwig Maximilian University Munich). Furthermore, there are double-major bachelor's programmes combining education with one other subject in which the amount of credit points related to education, and consequently to adult education, varies from one university to the next (programmes like these can be studied for instance at Humboldt University in Berlin or at the universities in Würzburg and Potsdam). But the amount of credit points in the single-major bachelor's courses with a concentration in adult education varies, too (cf. Heyl, 2012, p. 46). Faulstich, Graeßner, and Walber notice that the adult education-related contents in the bachelor's courses they studied was around 20 per cent (cf. Faulstich, Graeßner, & Walber, 2012, p. 32). Considering the bachelor's degree as a first academic qualification that should qualify graduates to work professionally in the labour market, and given the diversity of educational pathways at this first degree level in Germany, it is doubtful whether these studies offer the basic scientific knowledge and competences for professionalised work in adult education.

In contrast to the undergraduate programmes, the adult education-related master's courses offered in Germany have a variety of labels and provide many possibilities for specialisation (cf. Faulstich, Graeßner, & Walber, 2012, pp. 32–33). For example, there are programmes called 'research in continuing education and organisational development' (Dresden) or 'educational sciences with a main focus on heterogeneity in education' (Augsburg), in which adult education knowledge can be deepened. Some master's courses with a more general title give students the opportunity to choose a concentration in adult education (e.g. in the master's programmes offered

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source the keywords *Erwachsenenbildung* (adult education) and *Weiterbildung* (continuing education) were used to identify related programmes.

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in Tübingen, named ‘research and development in education,’ or Bamberg, named ‘educational sciences’). In some other master’s programmes, students cannot specialise in adult education even though adult education contents are taught in separate modules (e.g. the master’s programme in Chemnitz). In the master’s courses studied by Faulstich, Graeßner, and Walber, around 48 per cent of the content is related to adult education (cf. Faulstich, Graeßner, & Walber, 2012, p. 32). Consequently, it can be said that for the second-degree cycle in Germany, adult education topics are more visible, but very often they are also more specific (ibid, p. 37).

Overall, it appears from a structural point of view that adult education loses its relevance in the general educational programmes at the bachelor’s level, whereas at the master’s level, this can partly be compensated by study courses preparing students for special occupations in adult education. Although a recommendation for the structure of educational study programmes with a concentration in adult education, published by the German Educational Research Association (DGfE) in 2008, exists in Germany, neither bachelor’s nor master’s courses are currently organised on a common basis (cf. Heyl, 2012, pp. 48 ff.)<sup>2</sup>. This leads to diversification and a lack of transparency in academic offerings (cf. Frößinger, 2010, p. 4).

## **Opportunities for Academic Professionalisation in Adult Education in Italy**

The Bologna reform and the following legislative measures in the process of implementation in Italy had profound effects on the organisation and functional structures of the university system in general as well as on the debate within the academic community regarding the effects and range of the occurring changes (cf. Stefani, 2009). Starting from the 1999 university reform, a university network in adult education was established with the aim of rethinking and restructuring the study curriculum for the education of professionals in adult education in Italy. Within a few years, adult education gained visibility and was built on a comprehensive scientific base, which can be shown by the growth of professorships as well as the variety of study courses developed with the intention to create professional profiles in different areas of adult education (cf. Alberici & Orefice, 2006, pp. 99–100).

Nowadays, Italian higher education institutions offer various bachelor’s and master’s courses in adult education. They are generally defined as ‘sciences of education and training’. The following four selected examples provide an exemplary impression of the present study organisation at Italian universities:

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2 For more detailed information about the curriculum for study programmes in adult education see the contribution of Boffo, Kaleja, Sharif-Ali and Fernandes in this volume.

## University 'Roma Tre' in Rome:

- B.A. in Training and Human Resource Development (3-year course) including seminars in docimology<sup>3</sup> and evaluation of lifelong learning, 9 ECTS; adult education, 9 ECTS; technologies for adult education, 9 ECTS. (Università degli studi di Roma Tre: Corso di laurea triennale in formazione e sviluppo delle risorse umane 2014/2015)
- M.A. in Adult and Continuing Education (2-year course) including seminars in lifelong learning and adult education, 12 ECTS. (Università degli studi di Roma Tre: Corso di laurea magistrale in educazione degli adulti e formazione continua 2013/2014)

## University of Padua:

- B.A. in Educational Sciences and Training (3-year course) including a seminar in adult and continuing education, 6 ECTS. (Università degli studi di Padova: Curriculum formazione e sviluppo delle risorse umane 2014/2015)
- M.A. in Continuing Education (2-year course) including seminars in adult education, 9 ECTS; ethics of continuing education, 6 ECTS. (Università degli studi di Padova, offerta formativa 2013/2014)

## University of Firenze, Florence:

- B.A. in Social Education (3-year course) includes a seminar in social and adult education, 6 ECTS. (Università degli studi di Firenze: Offerta formative, corsi di laurea dell'Ateneo fiorentino, pedagogia sociale ed educazione degli adulti)
- M.A. in Adult Education, Continuing Education and Pedagogical Sciences (2-year course) including seminars in the foundations of adult and continuing education, 12 ECTS. (Università degli studi di Firenze: Fondamenti dell'educazione degli adulti e della formazione continua)

## Catholic University of the Sacred Heart:

- B.A. in Sciences of Education and Training (3-year course, situated in the area of the city of Brescia) includes pedagogy of the workplace and training, 10 ECTS. (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart: Offerta formative, corso di laurea triennale in scienze dell'educazione e della formazione, piano degli studi)

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3 These seminars focus on the historical benchmarks and theoretical framework for testing and assessment techniques (docimology) and evaluation research, with particular reference to adult competencies (Università degli studi di Roma Tre: Docimologia e valutazione dell'apprendimento permanente base).

- M.A. in Pedagogical Design and Training of Human Resources (2-year course, situated in the area of the city of Brescia) includes a seminar in the pedagogy of organisation and human resource development, 10 ECTS. (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart: Offerta formative, corso di laurea magistrale in progettazione pedagogica e formazione delle risorse umane, piano degli studi)

One example of academic studies in adult education in Italy is the master's degree programme at the University of Padua, which is designed to pursue various goals such as preparing specialists of continuing education and training programmes in the fields of continuing vocational training, adult education, learning, and upgrading human resources. Today, beginning in the 2014–2015 academic year, this MA course in 'continuing education' has become an interclass degree titled 'management of education and training'. It is characterised by the combination of two master's degrees: 'planning and management of education' and 'science of adult and continuing education'. The main attribute of this course is the opportunity for students to link theory with practice in various manners. In fact, the learners can do the *stage*, or internships, in some official organisation to enrich their knowledge and competencies. Also the students can complete their master's thesis during their *stage* or internship in the organisational context (Università degli studi di Padova, offerta formativa 2013/2014).

## Opportunities for Academic Professionalisation in Adult Education in Portugal

The field of academic professionalisation in adult and continuing education does not have a long history at Portuguese universities. Over the period of the Bologna process (launched in 1999), the lifetime of the EU Lifelong Learning programme (2007–2013), and the participation of the state in the development of European and international lifelong learning strategies, academic interest in research on the education of adults has increased, opening new horizons for learning experiences towards graduate trainings specifically directed to adult pedagogy (cf. European Association for the Education of Adults, 2011; Lima & Guimarães, 2011). Nowadays, both public and private universities support academic trainings in this domain at the levels of *licenciatura*<sup>4</sup> (similar to bachelor's, B.A.), master's, and PhD degree studies that propose diverse designations of the courses. The analysis of available online

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4 The Portuguese *licenciatura* consists of a three- or four-year course that students can attend after completing secondary education. It can be compared to bachelor's (B.A.) degree studies provided by some European universities.

study plans and programmes at the public universities illustrates the example of the common policy identified in the field. The Portuguese *licenciatura* (3-year course), which provides specialisations under the frameworks of community intervention, social education, and education or educational sciences, offers seminars (obligatory or optional) about professionalisation in adult and continuing education. These seminars have a workload of 5 to 10 ECTS<sup>5</sup> (see Table 1, based on the official sites of the Portuguese universities, spring-summer, 2015).

*Table 1: Some examples of Licenciatura at Portuguese public universities that offer seminars in adult education (based on the official sites of the Portuguese universities, spring-summer, 2015)*

University	<i>Licenciatura</i>
University of Lisbon, Institute of Education	Specialisation in education and training (3-year course), seminar in policy and practice of adult education and training, 5 ECTS. Specialisation in educational sciences (3-year course), seminar in adult training, 4.5 ECTS.
University of Algarve, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Psychology and Educational Sciences	Specialisation in educational sciences (3-year course), seminars in adult education and training, 5 ECTS, and lifelong learning, 5 ECTS.
University of Coimbra, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences	Specialisation in educational sciences (3-year course), seminar in adult education and training, 6 ECTS.
University of Porto, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences	Specialisation in educational sciences (3-year course), seminar in psychosociology in adult education, 6 ECTS.
University of Minho, Institute of Education	Specialisation in education (3-year course), optional seminar in adult pedagogy, 5 ECTS; projects and seminars in adult education and community intervention, 10 ECTS + 10 ECTS next semester.
University of Madeira, Centre of Social Sciences	Specialisation in educational sciences, optional seminar in adult education, 7.5 ECTS.

5 ECTS is short for European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, which includes a standard grading scale to make higher education comparable in Europe (cf. European Commission, 2015).

The specialisations exclusively dedicated to adult education with large workloads are mainly concentrated at the MA and PhD level (see Table 2). These courses focus on national and international theory-practice reflection on continuing and adult education policy.

*Table 2: Some examples of MA and PhD courses with a specialisation in adult education at Portuguese public universities (based on the official sites of the Portuguese universities, spring-summer, 2015)*

University	MA/PhD graduate courses
University of Lisbon, Institute of Education	MA in educational sciences, specialisation in adult training, 120 ECTS. MA in education, specialisation in adult training, 120 ECTS. PhD in education, specialisation in adult training, 180 ECTS.
NOVA University of Lisbon, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities and Faculty of Sciences and Technology	PhD in educational sciences, specialisation in adult education and training, 180 ECTS.
University of Coimbra, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences	MA in the education and training of adults and community intervention, 120 ECTS. PhD in educational sciences, specialisation in continuing and adult education, 180 ECTS.
University of Porto, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences	MA in adult education and training, 120 ECTS.
University of Minho, Institute of Education	MA in educational sciences, specialisation in adult education, 120 ECTS. MA in education, specialisation in adult education and community intervention, 120 ECTS.
University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro	MA in educational sciences, specialisation in adult education, 120 ECTS.

Different types of curricular trainings and internships are implemented in Portugal, mostly as part of MA and PhD programmes. They monitor the operationalisation and accomplishment of some educational projects and present quantitative and qualitative data to academic and executive communities. The results (probation reports, final course dissertations, and academic works) reflect the national framework related, for instance, to the implementation of the Programme for Development and Expansion of Adult Education and Training Knowing+ (1999–2006), the New Opportunities Initiative, the activities of the Competencies

Recognition, Validation, and Certification Centres, and the like (cf. Rothes, 2003; Lima & Guimarães, 2004). The recent actions determined by the CONVINTEA VI process (2009) and the implementation of the European Agenda of Lifelong Learning (2012–2014) promote comparative academic research and studies on the subject (cf. Pereira, 2012; Aguiar & Silva, 2013). However, diversified choices and complex alternatives in the academic context of professionalisation in adult education determine the attention that Portuguese stakeholders devote to reviewing the long-term strategies, constitution and sustainability of this scientific domain for providing a comprehensive sense of the profession, calling for cooperative work at the international level, and support employment opportunities and career development in the sector.

## Comparison

The juxtaposition of study programmes in Germany, Italy, and Portugal illustrates the current status of the Bologna process in the different national higher education systems. Whereas the changes in Germany were more focused on structural changes due to the prior existence of diploma programmes in adult education, the focus in Portugal and Italy changed towards raising the visibility of adult education as an academic discipline. Besides this, the Bologna Process as such marks a milestone in terms of being a common framework from which different situations have evolved in the process of academic professionalisation in adult education in each of the three countries examined.

Furthermore, the current situation in academic studies related to adult education in Germany and Portugal seems to be characterised, on the one hand, by a more general, interdisciplinary, and broad education at the bachelor's level, while, on the other hand, study programmes at the master's level are more specific and focused on specialisations in scientific research or special fields of adult education. The research performed for this article shows for selected study courses at the bachelor's and master's levels that the amount of ECTS related to adult education contents is lower for bachelor's courses than it is for master's courses. The situation in Italy regarding this issue cannot be clearly determined. Based on the examples given for study courses in Germany and Portugal, as well as the Bologna Process discourse that considers the bachelor's degree as the first degree that should enable graduates to work as professionals (cf. Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Framework, 2005, pp. 66–67), it is doubtful at least for Germany and Portugal whether graduates are sufficiently prepared for professional work in adult education after completing the first cycle of studies.

Regarding the aforementioned typical contradictions and antinomies that must be endured by adult educators in complex and changing practical situations, it was also important when doing the international comparison to find out whether possibilities for the personal development of competencies to act adequately in these situations are provided as part of students' academic studies in adult education. Therefore, it seems to be important to mention the opportunities to do internships or a *stage*, which is a special form of a voluntary internship during master's studies in Italy. Furthermore, also collaborations between universities and companies are implemented, including the *Parimun Project* in Italy, which offers the possibility for students to write their thesis or do research in an organisation working in the field of adult education in the Venetian region (La Facoltà di Scienze della Formazione dell'Università di Padova). In Germany, possibilities for connecting theoretical studies with practical experiences while pursuing a degree in adult education are offered, too, for instance, via internships that are part of the curriculum or via individual projects organised by the chairs of adult education at the universities (cf. Egloff & Männle, 2012, pp. 66ff.; Egetenmeyer & Schüßler, 2014, pp. 34–35). In the Portuguese case, a wide variety of trainings and internships are also featured in adult education programmes, focusing on research and providing data regarding a variety of topics. Overall, it can be questioned subsequently which ideas and expectations are linked to these existing possibilities to gain practical experiences during academic studies from different points of view in Germany, Italy, and Portugal. Further research is needed to analyse, for instance, the expectations students have regarding their internships or the ideas connected with internships from the perspective of the discipline of adult education in the different countries.

Summing up, the development of academic professionalisation appears as a progressive process faced with changing conditions. Even though the Bologna process as a milestone in the development of academic professionalisation is a framework shared by Germany, Italy, and Portugal, there are currently various differences between these countries in terms of the characteristics and pathways within the actual organisations. Further comparative research can reach a better understanding of the differences as well as the role that distinct national strategies related to adult education and lifelong learning play in these countries.

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