

complex environment of discourses, expectations and structures.

As there is no such a thing as a case that can be found. Case studies are rather being constructed, what we call ‘casing’ within the project, according to the researcher’s research questions, and objects in view of the social and scientific problems. This process of casing, the status and function of the LLL policies two regions, is described in the two following contributions. First, Tiago Neves, from the University of Porto, describes the casing for the two Portuguese Functional Regions. Second, Georgi Apostolov, from the South-West University in Blagoevgrad, presents the casing for the two Bulgarian Functional Regions.

2.1 LLL policies under the magnifying glass: the case of two Portuguese functional regions

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To present two case studies under the magnifying glass within the space constraints of a newsletter such as this is, quite definitely, a challenging task. I will do my best to address it by, first, drawing attention to contextual features that, for the most part, are similar in both studies. Next, I will highlight specific aspects of the LLL policies considered in each case. This piece will end with a brief comment on the status and function of the LLL policies considered.

In Portugal, a country with a history of strong centralisation, lifelong learning (LLL) policies, which are primarily focused on improving the educational levels of the population through vocational education and training, have a national scope. Thus, their overall mapping is identical throughout the territory. This being said, the two case studies that form the basis of this piece focus on national policies that get a particular emphasis in each of the two functional regions considered here, as a result of their specific features. These two functional regions have fundamental differences in their economic structure: Alentejo Litoral (in the south of the country) specialises in the energy industry and in logistics, while Vale do Ave (in the north) is one of the oldest and more renowned textile hubs in the country. However, these regions are similar in that, despite being well established in administrative terms, they have no political or financial autonomy; also, they face important education and employment challenges, and are located in the periphery of major metropolitan areas.



Figure 1. Alentejo Litoral Functional Region



Figure 2 Vale do Ave Functional Region

In both regions, the main institutions and actors involved in the governance of the skills ecology are public schools (under the tutelage of the Ministry of Education), and public training centres (under the tutelage of Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security). Also in both regions, the policy orientations of the actors and institutions involved in the governance of the skills ecology are mostly labour market oriented; local agents sometimes criticize this instrumental approach, emphasizing instead both the humanistic dimension of education and training systems. The two regions are also similar in that their intermunicipal communities and local development associations are key elements in managing the crucial EU funding and monitoring its use, as well as in diagnosing the regional skill needs and identifying the priority areas for education and vocational training. Furthermore, it should be stressed that both regions share a strong public commitment to the development of young adults' skills. A sign of this is the employers' involvement in skills formation markets through offering apprenticeship and internship vacancies, taking part in the boards of professional schools and in the advisory boards of training centres. It can be argued that the employers' involvement is even higher in Vale do Ave

than in Alentejo Litoral, as they are actively engaged in the elaboration of the SANQ (Forecasting System of Qualifications' Needs) report under the coordination of the intermunicipal community.

The Portuguese YOUNG_ADULLLT team focused on two specific LLL policies: the University of Porto team tackled the Professional Courses, in Vale do Ave, and the University of Lisbon addressed the Adult Education and Training Courses sponsored by the Institute of Employment and Professional Training, in Alentejo Litoral.

Professional Courses are an upper secondary vocational education provision that combines an upper secondary education certification with a professional certification (level 4). With upper secondary education being made compulsory in 2009, professional courses became the most important provision for the students that have no desire to pursue an academic education after the 9th grade. Indeed, in school year 2014-2015, 38,1% of the students attending upper secondary education were enrolled in professional courses. Despite this large proportion, these courses are still often regarded as a second-choice provision, targeted at low school achievers. These courses also have combined goals: on the one hand, they seek to prevent early school leaving and youth unemployment; on the other, they are directed at competitiveness, growth and employment, as they focus on matching the training offer to the priorities and needs of the different socioeconomic sectors and regional labour markets, thereby promoting the articulation between schools and enterprises. Importantly, while this measure is funded by the Portuguese Government and, to a great extent, by the European Social Fund, the companies and organisations where the curricular internships take place also contribute to its funding.

Although it is difficult to produce a precise assessment of the impact of the professional courses on employability, the most recent official evaluation report (Pereira, 2011) shows that 71,3% of the graduates were employed one year after graduation. Given that the unemployment rate of the Portuguese population aged between 15 and 24 was 27,8%, the unemployment rate of these graduates is similar to the national one (Pereira, 2011).

Adult Education and Training Courses were launched in 2000 and have become a central instrument for increasing adults' qualifications, namely by contributing to generalise upper secondary education as the lowest academic level of the Portuguese population. The courses vary according to the type of certification delivered: academic courses deliver an educational certification; professional ones deliver a double (educational and professional) certification. In addition to increasing educational and/or professional certifications, Adult Education and Training Courses also seek to reintegrate adults and support their progress in the labour market. As

such, their targets are working age adults, whether employed or unemployed, with qualifications below current compulsory education.

Following the recent economic crisis and the rise of the unemployment rate, these courses have become an active employment policy and a division of labour has taken place: academic Adult Education and Training Courses are mainly offered in schools, whereas professional ones are mostly offered by public training centres. The courses are funded directly by the European Social Fund and the Portuguese State, and indirectly by the companies involved in the in-job training.

The last national assessment of Adult Education and Training Courses took place in 2012 (Lima, 2012). The results showed that the probability of an unemployed person finding a job increased 14% for men and 2% for women who graduated from such courses, when compared to unemployed people who did not attend this type of courses.

From what was said above, it is clear that, in Portugal, there is a big faith in training and vocational education policies as being able to offer solutions to deal with young adults' LLL structural problems such as unemployment or early school leaving. It is open for debate whether this faith is simply naïve or such policies are strategically used as façades for not addressing more directly structural inequalities in the country. In any case, the over-reliance on the European Social Fund and the widespread understanding of professional courses as a second-choice provision are obstacles to a more successful implementation of such policies.

References and further reading

Lima, Francisco. (2012). Avaliação dos Cursos de Educação e Formação de Adultos e Formações Modulares Certificadas: Empregabilidade e Remunerações. Lisboa: GES/IST.

Pereira, Catarina. (Coord.) (2011). Avaliação dos percursos pósformação dos diplomados de cursos profissionais no contexto da expansão desta oferta no sistema nacional de qualificações. Lisboa: IESE-ANQ.



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2.2 LLL policies under the magnifying glass: the case of two Bulgarian functional regions