

Empirical and genealogical analysis of non-vocational adult education in Europe

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Abstract Non-formal, non-vocational adult education (NFNVAE) is a low-cost, low-threshold learning activity that generates many benefits for individuals and society, and it should play a more central role in educational policy. NFNVAE’s challenge is that it lacks clear concepts and definitions and is, therefore, less systematically covered in statistics, research and surveys. This article seeks to tackle these problems by providing (1) a mapping of NFNVAE courses in 10 European countries and (2) a conceptual framework for NFNVAE. The mapping is based on survey data ($n = 8,646$) that contain information on 14,063 courses, which were coded into 24 categories and three general types: civic, liberal and basic skills education. Popular adult education courses (in the radical meaning of the term) were not found among these data; therefore, further mapping is needed. The genealogical analysis shows that ideological discourses and cultural practices should be taken into account when different concepts are used to describe NFNVAE. Especially the concept “popular” needs more clarification, since it is frequently used to refer to several different traditions, for example the Nordic “*folkbildning*”, which is a civic education system, and therefore differs from Latin American popular adult education, which is a radical, non-governmental movement.

Keywords non-vocational education · non-formal education · adult education · liberal · popular · educational policy · genealogy

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Résumé Analyse empirique et généalogique de l'éducation non professionnelle des adultes en Europe – L'éducation non formelle et non professionnelle des adultes est une activité d'apprentissage à bas coût et à la portée de tous. Elle apporte des avantages tant aux individus qu'à la société et devrait donc occuper une place plus importante dans les politiques éducatives. Le défi de ce secteur éducatif réside dans son manque de concepts et de définitions explicites, il est par conséquent saisi de manière moins systématique dans les statistiques, études et enquêtes. Cet article tente de combler ces lacunes en fournissant 1) un inventaire des cours d'éducation non formelle et non professionnelle des adultes dans dix pays européens, et 2) un cadre conceptuel pour ce secteur éducatif. Le recensement se fonde sur des données d'enquête ($n = 8,646$) contenant des renseignements sur 14063 cours, qui ont été codifiés en 24 catégories et selon trois grands types : éducation citoyenne, éducation libérale et apprentissage des fondamentaux. Les cours populaires d'éducation des adultes (au sens radical du terme) ne figurant pas dans les données, cette cartographie reste à compléter. L'analyse généalogique révèle que les discours idéologiques et les pratiques culturelles doivent être pris en compte lorsque plusieurs concepts servent à décrire l'éducation non formelle et non professionnelle des adultes. Le concept « populaire » notamment a besoin d'être clarifié, puisqu'il est fréquemment utilisé pour désigner diverses traditions. Le *folkbildning* scandinave par exemple est un système d'éducation citoyenne et diffère donc de l'éducation populaire des adultes en Amérique latine, qui est un mouvement radical non gouvernemental.

Introduction

[A]dult education [...] begins where vocational education leaves off
Lindeman (1926, p. 7)

Background and aims

The importance of adult education has increased during the past 20 years, due in large part to the increasing focus on lifelong learning in European educational policy and the publication of major policy documents such as the *White Paper on Education and Training* (CEC 1995) and the *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (EC 2000) (Colley et al. 2006, p. 56; Holford et al. 2014, p. 267). The kind of adult education European Union (EU) policies and research have mainly focused on is vocational adult education and training (VET), since VET is more clearly connected to labour market policy objectives, such as increased employment in and competitiveness of the European Economic Area (Keogh 2009, pp. 11, 36), than other kinds of adult education. By contrast, non-formal adult education contributes to the development of some key competences, such as interpersonal, intercultural and social competences, civic competence and cultural expression.

This article is motivated by the fact that unlike VET, non-formal non-vocational adult education (NFNVAE) plays a marginal role in European policy and research. Non-vocational adult education can be defined as educational activities in which the learners are not primarily seeking to acquire work-related skills, but are instead “investing in learning for the pleasure of intellectual growth” and “knowing for its

own sake” (Micari 2003, pp. 27, 28). Participation in such activities is voluntary, based on individuals’ own learning interests, and such coursework does not lead to formal qualifications, degrees or certificates. These courses are typically organised by associations, adult education institutes or third sector organisations (Eurydice 2007, p. 7; Keogh 2009, p. 30).

NFNVAE motivates adults to engage more actively in learning, teaches skills which are to some extent work-related and brings about other career-related benefits, especially for less educated adults (Manninen et al. 2014). It offers low-threshold access to short adult education courses which are based on voluntary participation and on intrinsic motivation, and are therefore a more attractive route for more active learning careers, especially for those adults who do not feel an urge to engage in more demanding vocational training. This makes NFNVAE an important tool for promoting European policy objectives such as increasing participation rates (Keogh 2009, pp. 36, 57; Rubenson 2013). Unfortunately, this has only recently been recognised at EU level:

In many European countries, central authorities provide subsidies for liberal or popular adult education. Although the name of this sector varies between countries, provision generally includes various non-formal courses which often contribute to the development of a range of skills. These may act as a stepping stone or a springboard to further learning and qualifications. [...] *a dedicated study would be necessary to provide a thorough overview of this field [...]* (Eurydice 2015, p. 58, emphasis added).

The challenge has been that NFNVAE is still uncharted and conceptually vague. It is also less supported financially and lacks organisational structures and a clear role in national and European educational policies (Keogh 2009, p. 11; UIL 2013a, p. 3), which tend to focus on vocational adult education (Keogh 2009, p. 20).

This article has two aims. First, it seeks to analyse empirically the types of NFNVAE courses adults in Europe participate in, using survey data from 14,063 NFNVAE courses in 10 European countries. The data were collected as part of the Benefits of Lifelong Learning project (BeLL),¹ which analysed the wider benefits (Desjardins and Schuller 2010) to people’s lives of voluntary, non-vocational adult learning. The second aim is to develop a conceptual framework which helps define relevant concepts to describe and differentiate between NFNVAE courses. The conceptual analysis is based both on genealogy (Goodlad 2007) and on a typology of different political options for adult education (Picon 1991).

What is non-vocational adult education?

The organisational structures of NFNVAE vary considerably, with courses organised by institutions such as folk high schools, study associations, popular universities, universities of the third age, centres attached to churches, trade unions,

¹ The BeLL project (2011–2014) was coordinated by the German Institute of Adult Education (DIE) and funded by the European Commission as a part of the EU funding stream “Studies and Comparative Research” (KA 1 No. 519319-LLP-1-2011-1-DE-KA1-KA1SCR). All BeLL project team members, including the author of this article, contributed to the data collection. For more information, see www.bell-project.eu [accessed 29 March 2017].

political parties, professional associations, employer associations, civil society organisations, public and private museums and libraries as well as community, cultural and leisure centres (Keogh 2009, p. 36).

Non-vocational education has deep historical roots. The ancient Greeks rejected training in vocational skills, which they viewed as the *artes serviles* (skills of slaves), unsuitable for free citizens.² Instead, they stressed the importance of the *artes liberales* (liberal arts: philosophy, grammar, rhetoric, logic, arts, music and mathematics), which they viewed as the necessary basis for citizens to take an active role in civic life (Harva 1983, p. 48). This divide reflects the separation between intellectual and manual work in ancient Greece (Micari 2003, p. 28). In the mid-19th century, non-vocational adult education became an important activity contributing to the education of working-class people and peasants in France (Federighi 1999, p. 24), England (Sutcliffe 2014) and the Nordic countries (Kantasalmi and Hake 1997; Nordvall 2002; Koski and Filander 2013). In the early 20th century, American educator Eduard Lindeman (1926) stressed the importance of general adult education for personal and societal development. He wrote that adult education should elevate thinking from the “bread and butter” stage (Lindeman 1926, p. 99) in order to promote personal development and help create meaning in individual lives.

At present, NFNVAE is a lesser-known and lesser-structured form of adult education, and it is considered conceptually vague (UIL 2013a, p. 3) due to a lack of common definitions and concepts. At the moment, it is commonly described using the prefix “non”: non-vocational and non-formal. This is one reason for its neglect in European policy analyses, which have focused instead on vocational adult education (Bonnafous 2014; Holford et al. 2014).

The amount of research on NFNVAE is similarly paltry. Eurostat and the Adult Education Survey (AES)³ are ill-equipped to measure participation in NFNVAE (Boeren 2014); as a consequence, participation studies (e.g. Boeren et al. 2012; Roosmaa and Saar 2012) focus on VET, because it is better supported by statistics. Similar problems are present in surveys administered by the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC),⁴ in which interview questions about participation in non-formal adult education are related mainly to vocational courses paid for by the employer and engaged in with vocational motives in mind (see OECD 2013, Appendix 2, p. 6).

² Interestingly, similar attitudes still exist today. For example, non-vocational adult education is argued to be impractical for working-class people (Micari 2003, p. 29; Sutcliffe 2014), and only those types of learning which lead to vocational qualifications are valued in educational policy (Goodlad 2007, p. 116).

³ Eurostat is the statistical office of the European Union. It is located in Luxembourg. The Adult Education Survey (AES) is an ongoing survey series led by the European Union (EU). Since 2007, it has been interviewing people in private households about their participation in education activities (formal, non-formal and informal learning), focusing on citizens aged 25–64. The survey is carried out every five years and its results are published on the Eurostat website at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/adult-education-survey> [accessed 10 April 2017].

⁴ The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) is an ongoing survey series led by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Since 2011, it has been measuring key cognitive and workplace skills which are necessary for adults' participation in society and for national economic prosperity.

Conceptual analysis of NFNVAE

Conceptual framework

Two European glossaries focus on adult education: the *Glossary of Adult Learning in Europe* (Federighi 1999), published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the *European Adult Learning Glossary* (Litster et al. 2010), published by the EU. Unfortunately, both fail to provide conceptual clarity for the field; thus, there is a need to develop a coherent theoretical framework. A good starting point is Alan Rogers' typology of adult education programmes:

- A. Formal education programmes leading to a degree, offered by the formal education system;
- B. Vocational training programmes targeted at unemployed people or employees;
- C. Programmes leading to the acquisition of basic skills, targeted at culturally disadvantaged social groups;
- D. Programmes aimed at personal growth through courses in handicrafts, arts, sports, history, etc.; and
- E. Programmes aimed at social growth, targeting specific population groups with the aim of enhancing their roles in society, such as counselling for parents, women, trade union members, etc. (Rogers 1996, p. 21).

In terms of this typology, NFNVAE covers types C, D and E. Previous mappings and literature on NFNVAE indicate that there are different types of NFNVAE courses. Some of these can be labelled and defined quite easily. For example, *basic skills education* (Eurydice 2015) has an established role and clear definition in the field of NFNVAE, and matches type C in Rogers' typology. In anglophone literature, type D courses are commonly labelled as *liberal adult education* (House 1991). The general meaning of the term "liberal" is "the opposite of vocational", which originates from the idea of the liberal arts (*artes liberales*). The divide between vocational studies and liberal arts is often discussed in the context of secondary or university education (Lewis 1994; Scott 2014) as well as in the field of adult education (Micari 2003; Jarvis and Griffin 2003; Sutcliffe 2014). Another useful concept is *civic education* (Imel 2012), which covers community education (Jarvis 2014, p. 47) and other forms of education falling within the definition of type E. Civic education is not defined in the two existing European glossaries (Federighi 1999; Litster et al. 2010), even though there is extensive literature and research on the topic (Imel 2012; Carcasson and Sprain 2012).

Unlike the three concepts defined above, the quite common label of *popular adult education* is a messy one. In anglophone literature it has been used in several different meanings, describing "multiple traditions" (Flowers 2009) which differ from each other in many ways (for a good overview see Flowers 2009, pp. 9–10). It is often used to describe civic and democracy education activities organised for common people in the 18th and 19th centuries, but usually associated with a more radical definition and practice, which is especially prevalent in the Latin American

context (where it is termed *educación popular*; see for example Leher and Vittoria 2016). According to this tradition, popular adult education is a critical, radical and transformative form of action which is rooted in the Freirean tradition⁵ (Beck and Purcell 2010). It is a politically motivated form of civic action and social movement (Torres 1990; Cadena 1984; Caracata 2000), which stands in opposition to state-organised adult education, which is seen as a tool for indoctrination by the ruling class (Picon 1991; Kane 2013). Therefore this Latin American definition for popular adult education has clear radical and transformative connotations.

The *European Adult Learning Glossary* (Litster et al. 2010) does not mention the term “popular”, but defines the Swedish NFNVAE system using the term “liberal” (ibid., p. 44). Moreover, the various translations of “liberal adult education” provided in the glossary lack rigorous analysis and clarity. The term “liberal” is used for example in the German (*liberale Erwachsenenbildung*), Estonian (*täiskasvanute vabaharidus*) and Italian versions (*formazione libera dell'adulto*), but “popular” is used in the French translation (*éducation populaire*). In Portuguese, both forms are given (*educação liberal de adultos/educação popular dos adultos*). In Spanish, however, it is translated as *libre educación de adultos* rather than *educación popular*. The reason for opting for the former may be political; although *educación popular* is the more common term in the Spanish-speaking world, it also has the radical connotation described earlier. Conceptual fuzziness is also present in the *Glossary of Adult Learning in Europe* (Federighi 1999), in which the terms “liberal” and “popular” are used interchangeably in different chapters, depending on the nationality of the writer.

Genealogical analysis

Kari Kantasalmi and Barry Hake (1997, p. 353) suggest that to fully understand different conceptual underpinnings of adult education, one needs to consider the “ideological discourses and cultural practices” in that field. Genealogy has been called the “history of the present” (Goodlad 2007, p. 110), which is used to question the historical contexts of current definitions and concepts, particularly the “taken-for-granted ideas of the present time” (Andersson and Fejes 2005, p. 599). In this article, genealogical analysis (Goodlad 2007) serves to (1) highlight the context and circumstances in which different types of non-vocational adult education and the concepts used to describe these activities have emerged throughout history; and (2) position the current concepts used to describe NFNVAE within a wider conceptual framework. Genealogy can be used to reveal discursive (e.g. concepts used to describe NFNVAE) and non-discursive (e.g. specific NFNVAE courses offered) practices in implementing NFNVAE (Goodlad 2007, p. 109). This type of approach is helpful in understanding the definitions of the terms currently used to describe NFNVAE and the concepts underlying those terms.

Genealogical analysis is especially needed in the Nordic context, where the definitions become hazy when rendered in English when it comes to the *folkbildning* system, which constitutes an important component of NFNVAE in the Nordic

⁵ Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire (1921–1997) was a proponent of critical pedagogy.

countries. It has been translated as both “popular” (Laginder et al. 2013; Rubenson 2006, p. 337; Rubenson 2013) and “liberal” (Litster et al. 2010, p. 44; Jarvis 2014; Manninen 2010); occasionally, both terms are used, for example “Nordic popular (or liberal) adult education” (Antikainen 1998, p. 31; Eurydice 2015, p. 58). However, both English renderings are used to describe the Nordic NFNVAE system as a whole (not a type of course) and are based on a direct translation of the Swedish word “*folk*” (people) and Finnish word “*vapaa*” (free). The Swedish term “*folkbildning*” (education for people) easily translates into English as “popular education” (“folk” = people; see Nordvall 2002, p. 16). In a similar way, the Finnish term “*vapaa sivistystyö*” (free enlightenment work) leads into using the English term “liberal”. However, it should actually be translated as “free adult education” [in the sense of “freedom from a predetermined curriculum”], since it originates from the first official definition (Castrén 1929) of the Finnish non-vocational adult education system, which stressed learners’ own learning interests as a starting point for adult education: “It is to awaken and promote the *free endeavours to self-education* of adults [...]” (Castrén 1929, translated in Koski and Filander 2013, p. 590, emphasis added).

Therefore, usage of both of these concepts – liberal and popular – in the Nordic context is not based on the common definition of *liberal arts* (Scott 2014) and on a radical tradition of *popular adult education* (Beck and Purcell 2010), but on translations of the words “folk” and “free” which are used in the national concepts to describe the NFNVAE system. Both neglect the more general meanings of these terms in anglophone literature.

The use of that concept to describe the Nordic *folkbildning* system is based on the argument that *folkbildning* was originally organised by popular movements (see Flowers 2009, p. 10). However, these movements were rarely either radical or “popular”, instead they were often initiated by intellectuals “for” the people, not “by” the people. Historically, since the mid-19th century, NFNVAE in the Nordic countries has been a civic education project, not a radical popular movement. It has played a role in reformist social movements, aiming to facilitate the development of a more just and democratic society and fighting against ignorance, educational inequality, alcohol abuse and social injustice. The common thread in all of these objectives was to educate the common people so that they would serve as civilised and well-behaved citizens of the state (Kantasalmi and Hake 1997, pp. 354–363; Dahlstedt and Nordvall 2011, p. 245; Koski and Filander 2013, pp. 585–590).

There are some historical examples of more radical forms of education. In 1930s France, for example, working-class adults were provided with

mental training, in the form of *éducation populaire*, through which the working class’s mental musculature was strengthened, enabling them to respond to “ideas received”, [this], challenged the practice of transmitting culturally predetermined content and values (Federighi 1999, p. 6).

In the United States (see Olds 2005), Myles Horton established the Highlander Folk High School in 1932, which was a civil rights training centre for oppressed people. Students included future activists like Martin Luther King. In early 20th-century

Finland, there were some critical and revolutionary workers' education activist groups trying to protect working-class interests, but intellectuals established the municipal workers' institutes in 1914 as a counterforce for this radical worker's movement (Kantasalmi and Hake 1997, p. 369). Therefore, they were part of the state-financed civic education system, not a radical worker's movement. In Sweden, *folkbildning* started in the 19th century as a social – but still rather peaceful – movement; it has meanwhile been institutionalised and is now part of the Swedish corporate state (Nordvall 2013, pp. 123–124). Thus, neither the current Swedish *folkbildning* system (nor the Finnish one; see Manninen 2012) meets the radical definition of popular adult education, since it is supposed to be “conducted within the accepted democratic framework” (Osman 2013, p. 154). It follows that *popular adult education* is not the best concept to describe the Nordic system, even though it is often used in anglophone literature discussing the Nordic *folkbildning* system.

The role and “ideological discourses” (Kantasalmi and Hake 1997, p. 353) of non-vocational adult education in a given society can be analysed using Cesar Picon's typology of different political options for adult education:

From our historical experience we have learned that the actors involved in adult education do not have a neutral posture. They have ideologies and fundamental interests which they are attempting to legitimize [...] these actors are guided by and support one of the following basic political options: *maintenance and conservation* of the traditional ordering of the society, however unjust and unequal it may be; *reform to improve the system* and make the necessary adjustments for more equity; *structural transformation* leading to a new national order, whether by progressive steps or radical changes through revolutionary processes (Picon 1991, p. 81, emphases added).

This typology reflects the same idea as the two competing paradigms for societal development: radical change versus peaceful development (Burrell and Morgan 1979; see also Manninen 1998).

The genealogical conceptual map in Fig. 1 matches Picon's ideological aims and political options with discursive and non-discursive adult learning practices. It is obvious that *basic skills education* and *liberal adult education* serve the political option of maintenance and conservation of the current society and social order. Civic adult education aims for reform to improve the system peacefully. Structural transformation requires more radical adult education activities, which help adults to become aware of the “ruling class indoctrination”. Based on this genealogical analysis, I use the concept of *radical popular adult education* in this article instead of the shorter *popular adult education*, which is associated with the different traditions (Flowers 2009) and conceptual challenges described earlier.

The purpose of the following empirical analysis is to determine whether the 14,063 NFNVAE courses found in the BeLL study match the four adult learning practices and concepts as mapped in Figure 1.

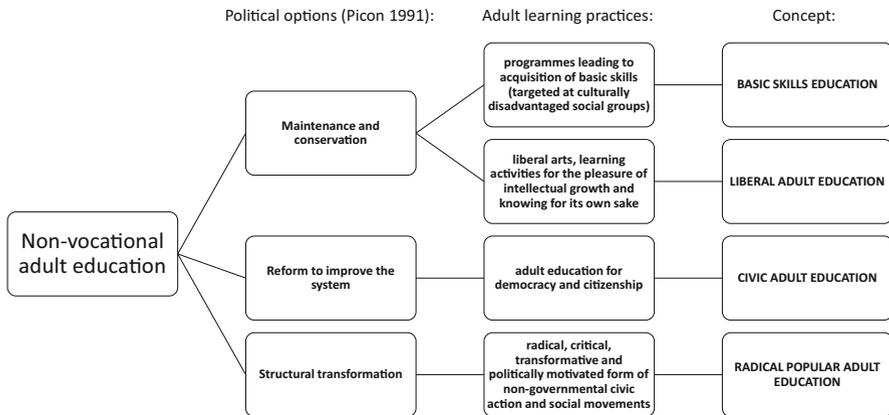


Fig. 1 Genealogical map of concepts related to non-formal, non-vocational adult education

Empirical analysis of NFNVAE course provision

Earlier mappings of NFNVAE

The few previous mappings of non-formal adult education (e.g. Eurydice 2007; Keogh 2009; UIL 2009) which have been carried out have passably covered those non-vocational courses which have clear linkages to the labour market, such as basic skills acquisition (Eurydice 2015) and literacy education (UIL 2013b), but have failed to sufficiently address many other types of non-vocational course provision. This failure can be ascribed to the fact that the analyses have been based primarily on official databases such as Eurybase, the database of the European education information network Eurydice.⁶ Eurybase stores information on *formal* education systems and provides only limited information on NFNVAE (Eurydice 2007, pp. 8, 59). The limitation is due in large part to the fact that many NFNVAE courses are organised by private actors, associations and volunteer organisations and are, therefore, not included in Eurybase. As a result, no clear picture is available of the provision of NFNVAE at the European level.

Previous attempts to map NFNVAE have been mainly linked to UNESCO and the series of International Conferences on Adult Education (CONFINTEA; derived from *Conférences Internationales sur l'Education des Adultes*), which are held roughly every 12 years. Eurydice (2007) analysed formal and non-formal adult education in 33 countries whose educational systems were described in Eurybase. Subsequently, a regional synthesis report on adult education in Europe, North America and Israel was prepared (Keogh 2009) for the CONFINTEA VI conference. A global analysis for the same conference was published by UNESCO (UIL 2009). Three years later, another global report (UIL 2013a, 2013b) gave an overview of the adult learning opportunities available around the world. All of these

⁶ For more information on the Eurydice network and its Eurybase database, see <http://www.eurydice.org/about/> and <http://www.eurydice.org/eurybase/> [both accessed 11 April 2017].

Table 1 Grouping of NFNVAE courses found in the earlier mappings

Concept	NFNVAE Course topics found in earlier mappings*
Basic skills education	Official/local language; basic language skills; language training for immigrants; basic skills in the use of information and communication technologies
Liberal adult education	Culture, arts, crafts, cuisine, dance, languages, literature, media, music and theatre; information and communication technologies as a hobby
Civic adult education	Social and political issues such as crime, environment, heritage, parenting, poverty, community development, current affairs, democratic participation, history, international relations and law; life skills or health issues; ageing, health
Radical popular adult education	–

*Eurydice 2007, p. 35; UIL 2013b, p. 115; UIL 2009, p. 50

reports (Eurydice 2007, p. 35; UIL 2013b, p. 115; UIL 2009, p. 50) demonstrate that the wide range of adult education activities can be grouped quite well under the first three of the four concepts defined in Figure 1. Table 1 matches the activities described in these reports to these overarching concepts.

As can be seen in Table 1, radical adult education is the only overarching concept which could not be matched to particular course offerings found in earlier mappings.

Empirical analysis

As mentioned earlier, the mapping of NFNVAE courses in this study was based on the empirical data collected for the BeLL project (Manninen et al. 2014). The study targeted adult learners who had participated in non-formal, non-vocational adult education courses during the 12 months preceding the survey in Spain, England, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Finland, Czechia, Slovenia, Romania and Serbia. Respondents were contacted through intermediaries who reflected the profile of national NFNVAE course providers as precisely as possible: national organisations and associations, course organisers and adult educators. The data were collected using both paper and online questionnaires available in the national languages.

The number of valid respondents was 8,646 (Table 2). Respondents were asked to list the names and topics of up to three NFNVAE courses in which they had participated. NFNVAE was defined for the respondents as

adult learning, related to your own interests and personal development, in which you participate voluntarily rather than as a requirement of your job or career. In this type of learning, you will not typically receive an external certificate at the end of the course.

Many respondents (38%) had participated in more than one course; therefore, the total number of courses included in the analysis was 14,063.

Table 2 Respondents and number of courses by country

Country	<i>n</i> of respondents	%	<i>n</i> of courses	%
England	709	8.2	1,171	8.3
Finland	1,252	14.5	2,330	16.6
Germany	902	10.4	1,694	12.0
Italy	543	6.3	793	5.6
Romania	1,043	12.1	2,173	15.5
Switzerland	274	3.2	464	3.3
Serbia	981	11.3	1,482	10.5
Spain	898	10.4	1,270	9.0
Czechia	989	11.4	988	7.0
Slovenia	1,055	12.2	1,698	12.1
Total	8,646	100	14,063	100

Source Manninen et al. (2014)

It should be noted that the data used in this (BeLL-based) analysis reflect the types of NFNVAE courses in which adults actually participated, not the complete listing of courses offered by providers. An alternative method would be to contact course organisers directly and ask them to report their course offerings. Both methods have advantages and disadvantages and would provide different points of view.

The analysis of course types was based on course names and topics (Table 3). Because no official course categories were available, we used qualitative, data-driven content analysis to derive categories. Analyses were conducted by national research teams in the original languages and verified by the lead researcher. The template used in the analyses (Table 4) was developed during the analysis process and finally included 24 categories of courses. The saturation point (Strauss and Corbin 1998, p. 136) was reached at an early stage of the analysis process; no new course categories were found after the first round of analysis of 684 courses offered in England and Finland.

In most cases, the course type was easy to define based on the name of the course (e.g. “ICT for beginners”). In other cases, the course description was also consulted

Table 3 Examples of content analysis of course categories

Name of the course	Topic of the course	Country	Course category (see Table 4)
Lip reading for beginners	Lip reading	ENG	special skills (cat 20)
Slim souls	Weight control	FIN	health-related courses (cat 7)
Active break	Back exercises	GER	health-related courses (cat 7)
First aid	First aid certification	ROM	social education (cat 1)
Singing	Singing technique	ITA	singing and performing arts (cat 11)
Bookkeeping	Advanced accounting	CZE	career-building courses (cat 21)

Notes: ENG = England; FIN = Finland; GER = Germany; ROM = Romania; ITA = Italy; CZE = Czechia

Table 4 Categories for course topic analysis

Main category	Subcategories and codes	Definitions	Examples
Society and culture	1 Social education	Soft skills, communicating, parenting, recycling, social support	Equality and diversity Safeguarding children First aid
	2 Political education	Active citizenship, politics, policy, working in associations	Current affairs and international issues Media and news
	4 History	History courses	Archaeology and history: aims and methods
	5 Culture	Talking and reflecting about music, literature, architecture, philosophy, arts, <i>art</i> history	Buildings in Derbyshire Art history Free will: philosophy
	24 Science courses	Science-related topics	Genes and the genome Astronomy
Languages	3 Languages	Language courses <i>as a hobby</i>	Intermediate German Learning Russian
ICT and skills	6 ICT	Computers and ICT at more advanced levels	Computer skills workshop Designing websites
	15 Basic competencies	Basic competencies such as managing own life and economy, employability skills, skills which are not defined	Money management: managing income and costs Employability skills: getting back to work
	16 Basic literacy skills	Courses on basic <i>literacy</i> skills	Adult literacy
	17 Basic numeracy skills	Courses on basic <i>numeracy</i> skills (counting, basic maths, using numbers)	Maths Foundation maths
	18 Basic language skills	Courses on <i>basic language</i> skills for <i>immigrants</i>	English for immigrants Catalan for immigrants
	19 Basic ICT skills	Courses on <i>basic</i> ICT skills for beginners	Learning how to use computers Computers for beginners
Health and Sports	20 Special skills	Learning special or rare skills, e.g. sign language, shorthand writing, magic tricks, etc.	Shorthand writing 1: Learning how to use shorthand writing
	7 Health-related courses	Courses promoting health awareness and behaviour	Mental health awareness Understanding dementia
	8 Sports	Sports, dance	Contemporary dance for mature movers Yoga

Table 4 continued

Main category	Subcategories and codes	Definitions	Examples
Creative activities	9 Handicrafts	Pottery, sewing, woodcarving	Pottery and ceramics level one Resin jewellery
	10 Music	Playing music and instruments	Intermediate guitar African drumming
	11 Singing & performing arts	Singing, improvisation, poetry recital	Raise your spirit in song Choral singing
	12 Arts	Arts: painting, photography	Painting Life drawing 2, term 2
	13 Baking and food	Food-related courses	Delicious pastries Mushrooms in the kitchen
	14 Creative writing	Courses developing creative writing skills	Creative writing The short story
	22 Animals	Courses related to pets or other animals	Care and riding of horses Rescue dog course
	23 Nature	Courses related to nature, plants, outdoors	Neighbourhood nature Geological walks in the peak district
Vocational topics	21 Career promoting courses	Courses providing vocational skills or facilitating access to further education	Access to Higher Education Open university courses

Source Manninen et al. (2014)

(for example, a course somewhat cryptically named “A monstrous regiment” was identified as a history course with the help of the topic descriptor “Tudors”). In some cases, the type of course provider was also relevant for interpretation.

Career-building courses (such as, for example, Access to Higher Education, Team leading) were coded into one course category, even though the objective was to analyse non-vocational course provision. These career-building courses were organised by NFNVAE organisations, and the adult learners typically attended on a voluntary basis and without expressing specific vocational reasons for participation. Participants often intended to use the skills acquired in these courses in voluntary work in third sector organisations (for example in project management). Historically, courses providing practical skills required for NGO (non-governmental organisation) activities (such as bookkeeping and corporate law) have played a central role in workers’ educational movements (Kantasalmi and Hake 1997, p. 364; Federighi 1999, p. 24). This category also included Open University courses.

Synthesis – conceptual mapping of NFNVAE provision

Table 5 describes the course categories identified in the analysis of the BeLL project data, listed in order of frequency and clustered into programme types (Rogers 1996). The last column indicates the overarching concept which best matches the associated adult learning practices described in Fig. 1.

The majority (66.2%) of the non-vocational courses found in this analysis were *liberal*, in the established sense of *artes liberales*. In addition, 11.4 per cent of the courses were identified as contributing to the acquisition of *basic skills*, 10.7 per cent were identified as contributing to participants' *civic education*, and 11.6 per cent were identified as *vocational training* (type B).

Courses which could be labelled *radical popular adult education* were missing in the data. The only potentially radical course categories identified in the analysis were Social education (7.5% of all courses) and Political education courses (3.2%). However, these courses have been defined here as contributing to *civic education*,

Table 5 The course categories found in the BeLL study in order of frequency

Categories by programme types	Frequency	%	Concept
TYPE C: BASIC SKILLS	1,608	11.4	
Basic ICT skills	957	6.8	} Basic skills education
Basic competencies	405	2.9	
Basic language skills	113	0.8	
Basic literacy skills	106	0.8	
Basic numeracy skills	27	0.2	
TYPE D: PERSONAL GROWTH	9,309	66.2	
Languages	2,478	17.6	} Liberal adult education
Sports	1,669	11.9	
Handicrafts	801	5.7	
ICT	767	5.5	
Culture	685	4.9	
Arts	664	4.7	
Singing	561	4.0	
Health-related courses	508	3.6	
History	243	1.7	
Creative writing	173	1.2	
Special skills	168	1.2	
Baking and food	155	1.1	
Music	154	1.1	
Nature	123	0.9	
Science courses	84	0.6	
Animals	76	0.5	
TYPE E: SOCIAL GROWTH	1,510	10.7	
Social education	1,057	7.5	} Civic education
Political education	453	3.2	
TYPE B VOCATIONAL TRAINING	1,636	11.6	
Career-building courses	1,636	11.6	
Total	14,063	100.0	

since the courses in these categories can still be considered “safe” for politicians and the ruling elites and would provide few revolutionary ideas for the participants. Some examples of the courses in the category of Civic education are described in Table 6.

These types of courses offer civic skills designed to support civic associations and active citizenship in order to develop a more democratic society peacefully, in Picon’s (1991) terms aiming for reform to improve the system and make the necessary adjustments for more equity. Such courses lack the radical and politically motivated agendas which could provoke civic action and encourage social movements to take real revolutionary action in society. Also, the course organisers are organisations or associations receiving state support, and therefore not likely to provide radical courses. For example the Italian course listed in Table 5 (“Understanding politics”) might potentially include some radical contents, but since it is organised by the University of the Third Age, the course is categorised as Civic education.

Another empirical indicator for the finding that Radical popular education courses do not exist in these data are the wider benefits generated by these non-vocational courses. None of the benefits found in the BeLL study – not even in the qualitative analysis of open questions ($n = 4,443$) and semi-structured interviews ($n = 81$) – were changes that could be interpreted as examples of radical awakening or increased critical consciousness (Manninen et al. 2014). These kinds of changes have not been identified in earlier benefit studies either (for an overview see Field

Table 6 Examples of Political education courses coded into the Civic education category

Name of the course	Topic of the course	Country	Course organiser
<i>Argumentationstraining gegen Stammtischparolen</i> [Argumentation training against slogans]	<i>Erfolgreich gegen Parolen und Populismus</i> [successfully countering slogans and populism]	GER	<i>Volkshochschule</i> [Folk high school]
<i>Capire la politica</i> [Understanding politics]	<i>I poteri “Fonti Deboli” nella società</i> [The power of “Strong Weak” in society]	ITA	<i>Università per la terza età</i> [University of the third age]
<i>Politička komunikacija</i> [Political communication]	<i>Učenje osnovnih vestina političke komunikacije</i> [Learning the basic skills of political communication]	SLO	<i>Center za socialno delo</i> [Office for social work]
<i>Međunarodno humanitarno pravo</i> [International humanitarian law]	<i>Učenje o postulatima međunarodnog prava</i> [Learning about postulates of humanitarian law]	SRB	<i>Centar za kulturu</i> [Cultural center]
Community development values	How to set up and deliver groups	ENG	Worker’s Educational Association (WEA)
<i>Kampanjat järjestöyön tukena</i> [Using campaigns in civic organisations]	<i>Kampanjan hoitaminen vapaaehtoisnäkökulmasta</i> [Volunteers as campaign organisers]	FIN	<i>Opintokeskus</i> [Study centre]

Notes: GER = Germany; ITA = Italy; SLO = Slovenia; SRB = Serbia; ENG = England; FIN = Finland

2009). On the contrary, the BeLL study verified the results of previous studies (see Field 2005; Merriam and Kee 2014) that there are benefits which could be expected from Civic education courses: participation generates more active citizenship, including increased interest in politics, trust in policy makers, joining associations, volunteering, and taking a more active role in one's community. It also generates civic competences (Hoskins and Crick 2010, p. 8) which equip individuals to fully participate in civic life, including knowledge of social and political concepts and structures and a commitment to active and democratic participation. According to the BeLL results (Manninen and Meriläinen 2014, pp. 85–88), participation in non-vocational adult education had developed participants' trust in decision makers in almost all countries, especially in Romania and Spain (mean = 4.37, SD 1.36; scale 1 = much less, 4 = no change, 7 = much more). There were no statistically significant differences on how Civic education courses contributed to this change; the impact was actually the same as in Liberal education courses. Also the interest in politics had increased, but only slightly (mean = 4.15, SD 1.62).

In addition, the BeLL results demonstrate that participation generates many other benefits like self-efficacy, new networks, well-being, happiness and work-related benefits etc., all of which feed into individual employability and "survival skills". It seems that non-vocational adult education generates individual well-being and builds social capital and cohesion, which help to maintain the current societal ordering and stability.

Limitations

The limitation of the empirical data used in this study is that the sampling was based primarily on the respective ten countries' national organisational structures for adult education. Therefore the mapping focused on adults who participated in courses organised by more or less institutional training providers which receive state support or at least operate openly and therefore largely represent the values of the state. In a similar way, previous mappings have been based mainly on Eurybase data, which are biased towards official education. Radical courses might have been identified if adult learners involved with political movements opposing neoliberal policies or feminist or environmental activist groups had been reached. More mappings using alternative sampling methods are needed.

Another limitation is potential errors in the analysis of course types. In some cases the name, topic and course provider give limited information about the actual aims and teaching processes during the courses, and therefore it cannot be ruled out that some Civic education courses might have radical elements even though the name and contents of the course indicate otherwise. Also, it is possible that basic skills or liberal arts courses include radical elements. For example, Paulo Freire started and disguised his Popular adult education courses as literacy courses in Latin America by using teaching methods which encouraged *conscientization* (Freire 1998).⁷ Therefore, further studies are also needed which provide a deeper analysis of course contents and practices.

⁷ Freire's concept of *conscientization* (or critical consciousness) is based on post-Marxist critical theory. It refers to reaching a comprehensive understanding of the world, becoming aware of social and political contradictions, and taking action against the oppressive elements identified through that awareness.

Conclusions and discussion

The results of this empirical and genealogical analysis show that NFNVAE provision includes a wide variety of different types of courses, in other words: it is not a uniform field. The courses adults participate in have several aims, which I have analysed here using the three political options suggested by Picon (1991). The majority (90%) of NFNVAE courses found in this study either offer basic skills and liberal arts or they are career-promoting courses, and therefore in Picon's terms serve the maintenance and conservation of the traditional order of society. Only 10 per cent of the courses try to peacefully improve society by offering civic skills and political education.

The genealogical analysis also shows that the terminology used to describe different non-vocational course types is inconsistent. Based on these results, I would like to suggest that three concepts are needed to describe the different types of NFNVAE found in these empirical data and in previous mappings. *Liberal adult education* is the obvious concept for liberal arts courses. *Basic skills education* is a suitable concept for courses in literacy, numeracy, basic ICT and basic language skills. *Civic adult education* is a good descriptor for courses which aim to strengthen notions of democracy and active citizenship.

However, it seems that these data do not include courses which match the radical tradition (Flowers 2009) of popular adult education. Therefore it is confusing if the concept of *popular adult education* is used to describe the Nordic NFNVAE system, which offers mainly courses which actually belong into the categories of liberal arts or civic education. To avoid conceptual fuzziness and misunderstandings, I would therefore suggest sharpening the concept of "popular" adult education by using different prefixes to differentiate between different traditions described by Rick Flowers (2009, pp. 9–10). A good example is to use concepts like *Institutionalised popular adult education* (Turunen 2015) or *Nordic popular adult education* (Antikainen 1998; Turunen 2016) when describing the Nordic *folkbildning* system. Similarly, I would also suggest using *Radical popular adult education* when the concept is referred to in its Latin American meaning to describe politically radical courses and non-governmental civic movements, which are aiming for the third political option, structural transformation (Picon 1991).

Even though Radical popular adult education courses were not found in the BeLL data or in earlier mappings, it is obvious that Radical adult education courses are on offer and are needed to raise critical awareness of societal inequalities, sustainable development, oppression and gender equality issues. But where are the Radical popular adult education courses located nowadays? One potential example of current more radical adult education is feminist education (Yang 2016), especially when it is based on the Habermasian critical-emancipatory paradigm⁸ (Humble and Morgaine 2002). However, in many cases feminist education is not overly radical (see for example Larsson 2013), and perhaps not considered as a threat to male-dominated society and therefore receives state support. But would it be possible to

⁸ German sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas's critical-emancipatory paradigm is based on the idea that knowledge and learning should be used to change current practices.

receive state support for an anarchist summer school⁹ or anarchist Summer University,¹⁰ if these were considered to be a threat to public safety and the current regime? Or for courses organised by revolutionary movements preparing a *coup d'état* (for example Bolsheviks in early 19th-century Russia) or by terrorist groups (like Daesh¹¹)?

Do radical courses still exist, or have they been “tamed” and become part of the state-controlled education system, as some authors suggest (Nordvall 2013; Osman 2013)? Nowadays radical education promoters seem to operate more on the theoretical and philosophical level (concerning what the aims of adult education should be) than on a practical level (concerning what is actually done). For example, the 22 plenary papers presented at the 6th International Conference on Critical Education (ICCE 2016) can be categorised into three groups. The majority of them are (1) theoretical and philosophical papers (for example “The realist Marx: Understanding Education as Revolutionizing Practice”) or (2) politically oriented papers suggesting new policies or actions (for example “Nurturing Dissent: Developing the Unruly Subject in Higher Education” and “Neo-conservatism, Precarity and New Citizenship Education in Poland”), but (3) only one practice paper, referring to Latin American popular movements (“Producing Knowledge, Building Social Movements: Learning with the Rural Brazilian Landless Movement [MST]”). Among the ordinary conference presentations there are only two case studies describing actual radical education projects, one in Chile and one in India (see ICCE 2016). The same tendency towards more theoretical discussion than practical application can be seen in the “popular” adult education literature (e.g. Connolly et al. 1996; Laginder et al. 2013).

The reason why in some countries (especially in Nordic countries) the state provides funding for less dangerous types of non-vocational adult education (basic skills, liberal arts and civic education) is that NFNVAE plays an important role in society by generating stability as well as human and social capital. Wider benefit studies (Desjardins and Schuller 2010; Manninen 2010; Manninen et al. 2014) show that it generates many key competencies and other individual and societal benefits, such as well-being and social cohesion, and is therefore considered as a system worth financing.

NFNVAE is needed, now more than ever before, to develop a more just and stable society, as Europe faces many indigenous and external challenges, for example those caused by the refugee crisis. Increasing numbers of immigrants also guarantee that there is a growing need for basic skills education (especially basic language education and literacy) and for civic education. Therefore, my suggestion is to add the category of non-vocational adult education to national and European statistics (Eurostat) databases (such as Eurybase) and surveys (PIAAC) using the four concepts and definitions provided in this analysis. This would help researchers

⁹ For a review of one of these held in Glasgow in the early 1990s, see Heavens and Campin 1993.

¹⁰ For information (in Icelandic and English) on a “Radical Summer University” held in Reykjavík in 2016, see <http://sumarhaskolinn.org/> [accessed 30 March 2017].

¹¹ DAESH (also sometimes spelled DAIISH or Da’esh) is an acronym derived from the Arabic term for Islamic State.

and policy makers gain a better understanding of the wide range of lifelong learning activities outside the vocational adult education system. NFNVAE should be included in national and European lifelong learning policies, and more mappings of NFNVAE need to be carried out.

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