

Adult education in Portugal: Reflections between past and present

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Abstract – *In this paper I consider some important historical phases in the development of Adult Education in Portugal, in the attempt to compare past and present choices in this matter. I conclude that there is not only an evident element of discontinuity in the process of Adult education, but this process is also marked by advances and setbacks, which are closely related both to internal politics and ideology, on the one hand, and to international trends, on the other hand.*

Riassunto – *In questo lavoro prendo in esame alcune importanti fasi storiche nello sviluppo dell'educazione degli adulti in Portogallo, nel tentativo di confrontare le scelte passate e presenti in questo ambito. Ne concludo che non c'è solo un evidente elemento di discontinuità nel processo di educazione degli adulti, ma che questo processo è anche segnato da progressi e battute d'arresto, che sono strettamente legati sia alla politica interna e all'ideologia, da un lato, sia alle tendenze internazionali, dall'altro.*

Keywords – Portugal, adult education, society, politics, school

Parole chiave – Portogallo, educazione degli adulti, società, politica, scuola

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1. The prehistory of adult education in Portugal

The objective of this article is to reflect on some of the major moments of the historic journey of adult education in Portugal, seeking to set the dialogue between some aspects of the past and the present of adult education. Having this in mind, I start with a somewhat provocative quotation from Rui Canário, a well-known Portuguese author in the field of adult education: “By conceiving education as a broad and multiform process that is intertwined with each

individual's life process it becomes clear that adult education has always existed" ¹. This statement, which is understood here in its broader features, is certainly true. But on a more specific sense and with a more regular bases, adult education begun in the last decades of the nineteenth century. It was throughout this period, from the moment the data of the first population census became known (1864 and particularly 1878), that the Portuguese intellectual and political elite became aware that the overwhelming majority of the Portuguese population (about 80%) was analphabetic, i.e., could not read or write. Furthermore, the civic and pedagogical discourse of liberalism and later republicanism had closely articulated alphabetization and citizenship. One of the main purposes of public liberal instruction was to educate the necessary citizens for the new order and the school was considered to be the premier place for this education. The exercise of the right to vote on the representative regimes was also considered a duty and it implied that citizens were aware of their rights and duties. At the time, consciousness was believed to arise from a minimal set of knowledge, specifically reading and writing, which only school could provide.

Insofar some key initiatives to fight analphabetism were set in motion at this stage and they also included adult education. Moreover, the transition from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century was a period of intense associative movements in favour of the alphabetization of the people, not only due to republicanism, but also due to the freemasons, liberal philanthropy or organized labour. Among the most emblematic initiatives are the Mobile Schools that used the Method João de Deus,, which were organized by an Association created in 1881 by Casimiro Freire. These initiatives would be made official in 1913, during the Republic. The main purpose of those "missions" was clear: "Fight analphabetism in places where there was not enough attendance to justify the creation of a "fixed school"². Meanwhile, having the alphabetization of the Portuguese amongst their goals, many other initiatives were developed, such as working schools (with the network of schools subordinated to the Voz do Operário [Worker's Voice] association, founded in 1883 by Tabaco handlers, standing out among them), asylums, schools attached to the republican centres or Sunday and evening courses.

2. The example of Popular Universities

The Portuguese cultural environment of the first decades of the twentieth century was favourable to the development of popular education concerns, namely regarding adult education. The beliefs of positivistic root on the decisive part of education and culture as a source of progress and social regeneration, the republican political investment, considered to be inseparable from the combat against analphabetism, and the cultural labour of the freemason's illuminist bias are some of the conditions that favour the assertion of a discourse that places people and their education at the centre of the political and social debate. Accordingly, a vast

¹ R. Canário, *Educação de adultos: um campo e uma problemática*, Lisboa, Educa, 1999, p. 11.

² J. S. Sampaio, "*Escolas móveis (contribuição monográfica)*", in "Boletim bibliográfico e informativo: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian – Centro de Investigação Pedagógica", 9, 1969, p. 10.

array of experiences in the fields of popular education and scientific and cultural disclosure were brought to life. Among many others, the Popular Free Universities are an example of these experiences. These institutions promoted diverse activities in the so-called field of cultural extension, such as the conduction of courses and lectures on literary and scientific themes, organization of classical music concerts and field trips to monuments and museums, in addition to the publication of journals and books.

Behind this kind of initiatives, which arose from society's critical consciousness role, was the idea that intellectuals should lead the workers and all people to the desired moral and intellectual regeneration. As noted by Rogério Fernandes, we thus watch the "drawing of an enriching conception of popular education" and "the framework of a differentiated "pedagogy" for adults" while "a vigorous affirmation of the social value of science and its diffusion"³ is registered. According to what was believed at the time, the people's cultural and civic promotion included the access to alphabetization that was until then a privilege of the elites, which thus was intended to be made available to all. In this regard, the term "popular science" is enlightening. There was the belief that knowledge and competencies set first for the erudite culture – literature, art, science – could be made accessible to the people. This was believed to be a prime strategy to remove the people from cultural and civic minority. This was a tendentiously integrative project set under the enlightened leadership of a certain intellectual elite, but it frequently stumbled upon the indifference of the popular and working means. Despite some idealism and obvious weaknesses regarding permanent adult education, popular universities represent one of the most interesting experiences established during the first half of the twentieth century.

3. From distrust in alphabetization to the Popular Education Plan

In the transition from the Military Dictatorship, which replaced the Republic in 1926, to Salazar's New State, instituted in 1932/33, a set of discourses defending the virtues of analphabetism and highlighting the dangers of alphabetization were broadcasted by some intellectuals with connections to the most conservative sectors of the regime. To this regard, one of the most paradigmatic writings came from the writer Virginia de Castro e Almeida and it was published in 1927 in the newspaper *O Século* [The Century]: "Knowing how to read and write creates ambitions: they will want to go to the cities to be clerks' apprentices, clerks, gentlemen; they will want to go to Brazil. They will have learnt how to read. What do they read? Crime affairs; political misconceptions; bad books; subversive propaganda leaflets. They drop the hoe, loose interest in the land and have only one ambition: to become public employees. What advantages did they get from school? None. Nothing gained. Everything is lost. Blessed are those who have forgotten the letters and have returned to the hoe. The most beautiful, strong-

³ R. Fernandes, *Uma experiência de formação de adultos na 1ª República: a Universidade Livre para Educação Popular: 1911-1917*, Lisboa, Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, 1993, p. 11.

est and healthiest part of the Portuguese soul lies on those 75 percent of analphabets”⁴. This excerpt shows quite efficiently some of the major platitudes of conservative thought regarding alphabetization: the fear of the abandonment of the fields and the favour of social mobility; the fear of deceptive readings and particularly of its subversive character; the idealization of the good Portuguese people, which were simple, happy and analphabetic.

However, as we know, this was not the official position of the New State. In fact, even showing some caution and without assuming this type of rhetoric, the chosen option was the promotion of schooling for the Portuguese and particularly to take advantage of this schooling as a strategy to promote the dear values of Salazarism (God, Country, Family, Order, Authority, Work, among others) and modelling the desired behaviours towards social conformity. These cautions were related, among other things, with the attempt to curb social mobility processes, which could shudder the established order. António Nóvoa mentions that this option was a clear manifestation of the “New State’s pragmatism, which was guided by conceptions of minimum schooling, moral framework and social mobility control”⁵.

The ensuing context of the Allied victory at World War II forced the regime to make an effort to adapt itself to the new circumstances, namely regarding a certain international openness and wagering, albeit moderate, on economic development. Comparatively speaking, the “retardation” was still our stigma. Therefore, the regime reinforces the combat to analphabetism in a more visible and decisive way. The most emblematic initiative developed in that field was the Popular Education Plan, launched in 1952, which had an aggregated campaign for Adult Education. The mobilization speeches against the old national evil have strongly returned, now with some new and unexpected actors. The great advocate of the good news was then the State’s sub secretary Henrique Veiga de Macedo. The campaigns ideologue was the National Education Minister Fernando Pires de Lima (1947-1955). Both clearly deviate, without abandoning the regime’s orthodoxy, from the distrusting and reservation positions towards alphabetization, which were present in the previous phase. The following words are from Veiga de Macedo: “We will not line up with those that in a superficial and distorted vision of things are convinced that illiterates are by definition the moral reserve of the people, as if ignorance and intellectual retardation were synonyms of perfection and virtue”⁶. On the contrary, as stated by Rui Ramos, to those actors it was the “low morale, material and cultural panorama” that explained “the lack of hygiene, alcoholism, irresponsibility and idleness”. Thus, the Popular Education Plan aimed to subject analphabetism to a “shock treatment”, predicting “the use of great means of propaganda (press, radio, cinema, and cultural missions), the use of police intervention, and the establishment of inhibitions and disabilities for the analphabets”⁷.

The discourse had clearly changed its tone. From some complicity towards the analphabets, even if accompanied by an effort towards education, to a scathing critique of analphabet-

⁴ M. F. Mónica, “*Deve-se ensinar o povo a ler?: a questão do analfabetismo (1926-39)*”, in “*Análise Social*”, XIII, 50, 1977, p. 327.

⁵ A. Nóvoa, *Evidentemente: Histórias da educação*, Porto, Edições ASA, 2005, p. 97.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ R. Ramos, *Analfabetismo*, in A. Barreto, M. F. Mónica (Coord.), *Dicionário de História de Portugal*, v. VII – Suplemento, Lisboa-Porto, Livraria Figueirinhas, 1999, p. 99.

ism's situation and an appreciation of the economic implications of school knowledge. As in the mid-nineteenth century, the penalties that reached the analphabets were considered to be a good strategy to reinforce schooling. Although the immediate goals of the campaign referred to a reading, writing and arithmetic's apprenticeship, the concerns remained regarding the need of a strong moral framework of a nationalistic, corporative and catholic character, with the convenience of not encouraging strategies of "professional and social mobility"⁸.

According to António Nóvoa, "by seeking to ensure an investment in education, albeit limited, without however promoting social mobility, the New State sets out an equation without solution"⁹. It was a challenging equilibrium and it was meant to failure at a medium term, as its future path shows. Still, the regime succeeded using these and other means, with almost full enrolment of school-aged children. Nevertheless, one should consider the limited levels of the time. During the transition from the fifties to the sixties, the expansion of compulsory school was permitted, which in 1964 was set at 6 years for both sexes. Despite the attempts to break the process, we found ourselves already in the process of massification. The high percentage of adult analphabets remained, but as accurately noted by Rui Ramos, "perhaps it was expected that the "course of time", as it was emphatically said in 1953, would wipe the statistics. Cemeteries would accomplish what the school did not"¹⁰.

4. Alphabetization and adult education in the revolutionary period

The discursive production of the revolutionary period inaugurated by 25 April 1974 was deeply marked – as probably all modern revolutions are – by some kind of mythology of the new. The ambitious project to build a new society, a new school, a new man is permanently present. Most discourses produced in the field of alphabetization emphasize the need to invest in this construction by this means. It is vehemently said that the citizens of the new society unveiled by the revolution needed to possess minimum reading, writing and calculus competences to be able to consciously and actively intervene in democratic life. Accordingly, some actions of diverse origin and nature (student associative movements, political organizations, Armed Forces Movement, catholic groups, popular organizations, etc.) were brought to life. These were completely or partially devoted to alphabetization and adult education, with particular emphasis on the Alphabetization and Health Education Campaigns, held in the Summer of 1974, and the two most publicized and polemic movements at this level, if one does not count the MFA's Cultural Stimulation Campaigns, in which the alphabetization component was residual, or even the Student's Civic Service, which also included an alphabetization dimension. The initiatives that were developed ultimately combine alphabetization and political so-

⁸ C. Barcoso, *O Zé Analfabeto no cinema: o cinema na Campanha Nacional de Educação de Adultos de 1952 a 1956*, Lisboa, Educa, 2002, p. 40.

⁹ A. Nóvoa, *Evidentemente: Histórias da educação*, cit., p. 97.

¹⁰ R. Ramos, *Analfabetismo*, cit., p. 100.

cialization in different degrees, as well as health education and cultural activities, among other aspects.

Another key characteristic of the pedagogical discourse of the revolutionary period which directly embodies the debate on analphabetism is the idea that political revolution – in this case, represented by the 25 April – would not be enough to create a new society. It would be necessary to initiate a true cultural revolution. Alphabetization is important in this context, not just specifically by the acquisition of the necessary competences to read and write, but particularly for being a part of a broader and ambitious project that wishes to change mentalities. This question is carried out, for example, in an article of the journal *O Professor* [The Teacher], subscribed by A.M. and significantly entitled “cultural revolution”: “Cultural revolution will have as its agenda “the bringing of knowledge to the people”, because “freedom is intimately connected with knowledge” [Vasco Gonçalves]. It shall essentially consist on an alphabetization triplex – alphabetic, cultural and political – through which all analphabets will learn how to read, write, think, chose and consciously intervene in their country’s life”¹¹. Firstly, one can emphasize the articulation that is made between “freedom” and “knowledge”. It is from the enlightenment, liberal and republican traditions that the latter – “knowledge” – is considered to be essential to the exercise of civic freedom. Hence the relevance of the issues regarding analphabetism and alphabetization in those contexts, as it also happens in the post-25 April period. Another author published in *O Professor* [The Teacher] – Helena Cidade Moura – even states within the line of this tradition: “Analphabetism is a mythical and fatalistic spot on the Portuguese society; it is a Sebastianist fog where reality is safeguarded”¹². It is also within an enlightenment perspective that one can imagine – returning to the text of A. M. – that intellectuals (namely students) can be the ones to “bring knowledge to the people”. Here is the underlying idea of the “enlightened pedagogue” who identifies himself with the people, to use an expression taken from Stephen Stoer¹³. Finally, the complex and multifaceted sense given to the notion of alphabetization is very interesting, since it is understood as “literacy triplex – alphabetic, cultural, political”. In addition to the traditional reading and writing competences associated with this notion, it is broadened, particularly to “how to think” and “consciously intervene in its countries life”. It is, on the one hand, an plea to the civic consciousness and, on the other hand, to the previously mentioned dimension of participation or civic intervention.

However, the borderline between the so-called Cultural Revolution and ideological inculcation is very thin. *Esquema de Anteprojecto* [Preliminary Project Scheme] was a document produced within the revolutionary context to prepare a reform in the fields of alphabetization and adult education that would lead to the elaboration of a National Alphabetization Plan. This document mentions, for instance, the need to create a “political awareness of all Portuguese people, which leads them to positively determine the transition path to socialism” or also the claim that the Plan “would become one of the pillars of popular mobilization needed for an au-

¹¹ A. M., *Revolução cultural: do exercício da alienação para o exercício da liberdade*, in “O Professor”, 8, 1975, pp. 20-21.

¹² H. C. Moura, *Alfabetização: Participação das populações*, in “O Professor”, 2, 1977, p. 30.

¹³ S. R. Stoer, *Educação e mudança social em Portugal: 1970-1980: uma década de transição*, Porto, Edições Afrontamento, 1986, p. 184.

thentic socialist revolution”¹⁴. I should, however, draw attention to the importance that the notion “popular mobilization” has in the speeches of a time where public life was deeply marked by an intense politicization. The idea that politics and ideology were a transverse phenomenon present in all social life domains was assumed without complexes. Despite the call to “mobilization” you can naturally wonder if it was not the doctrine component that ultimately prevailed (or not) instead of the proclaimed desire to educate participative, active and conscious citizens. The purpose of this literacy project was undoubtedly the creation of a socialist society. School was not neutral within that view, nor could it be. This is also what is stated in a literacy schoolbook of the end of that period: “Thus, we believe that class origin, class option, militancy, and ideology of those who want work on alphabetization is fundamental. For us both alphabetization and education are political acts and consequently there are no neutral monitors”¹⁵.

Another striking feature of the revolutionary discourse is the rhetorical use of notions such as “people”, “working masses”, among others; expressions whose range, despite its vagueness, can muster consensus and mobilize wills. The pedagogical discourse, as well as the political, reverses this kind of supreme identity and redemptive power. The literacy campaigns developed by students frequently show the great learning that results from the contact with the people. During a group interview made to students that were participating in the alphabetization campaign in the summer of 1974, one of the young man states that “fundamentally, we, the students, were the ones who learned from the campaigns. We learned what were the living conditions of the people”¹⁶. Despite this rhetoric and corresponding mystification of the people’s discursive figure, the texts – such as *Esquema de Anteprojeto* [Preliminary Project Scheme] – are still an expression of another less idealized look on the reality of the people and the popular culture. The document states that “Portuguese analphabetism is concentrated in rural areas” and that these “analphabet environments” – based on a “culture built on oral tradition” – are “fundamentally conservative of the past”, having a mythical, magic or naïve consciousness of all reality. Although this culture is also considered to be “coherent, rich and imbued with true values”, what prevails is a devalued look over the rural world, which underlines its retarded condition, the prevalence of ignorance, prejudice and lack of hygiene habits, situation whose responsibility is, however, attributed to the previous regime. It is this diagnosis that underlies the option of levying the campaigns of that phase (1974 and 1975) on the northern interior of Portugal, where “the revolutionary progress has not yet arrived” and the population is influenced by “caciques”¹⁷. Some distrust regarding the illiterate and their culture still prevails. There is still no belief in the possibility that those men and women can develop a civic consciousness and, therefore, can participate in the public life. The fear that their ingenuity can be exploited by the so-called reaction agents remains.

¹⁴ *Esquema de anteprojeto do Programa Nacional de Alfabetização*, Lisboa, Ministério da Educação e Cultura – Direção-Geral da Educação Permanente, 1975, p. 11.

¹⁵ *Manual de alfabetização: Para quem quer aprender com o povo*, Lisboa, Edições Base, 1977, p. 36.

¹⁶ “*Campanhas de alfabetização*”, in “*O Professor*”, 4-5, 1974, p. 35.

¹⁷ *Esquema de anteprojeto do Programa Nacional de Alfabetização*, Lisboa, Ministério da Educação e Cultura – Direção-Geral da Educação Permanente, 1975, pp. 1-2.

Towards the end of the revolutionary period, from the appointment of Alberto Melo as the head of the Permanent Education General Directorate, in December 1975, an interesting experience within the framework of adult education was developed based on a decentralized approach and on the active role of the then existing intense associative movement. This moment was, as stated by Rosanna Barros, “a unique *golden period* in the history of the sector”¹⁸, which nevertheless also implied a certain idealization of the people and popular culture. The then outlined “associative paradigm” had a law from May 1976 as starting point, where, according to Fernando Belchior, at the same time as the school model is relativized “there is the refusal of any aggressive intervention which collides with the population’s traditional pattern and its collective organization is defended, based on associativism, as a path towards an education of a liberating sense and the solid construction of a democratic society”¹⁹. With greatest expression in the sixties and the seventies, this is perhaps one of the moments when adult education has come closest to a historically idealized model within the progressive pedagogical field. According to Cristina Rodrigues and António Nóvoa “the currents of Adult Education did not tire from claiming a non-schooled education, the appreciation of experience, the promotion of autonomy, the reinforcement of “communities of practice””²⁰.

5. The institutionalization of adult education in Portugal

It was, however, only in the 80s and 90s that we could watch the institutionalization of adult education in Portugal, based on the unanimous approval of a law regarding the elimination of analphabetism and the basic adult education. This law was approved in January 1979 at the Republic’s Assembly, which is the Portuguese parliament, and led to the elaboration of the so-called Alphabetization Plan and Basic Adult Education. Such institutionalization also represented perhaps the consecration of a more reducing view of adult education. In the opinion of Rita Barros: “Despite the implementation of these programmes and the meagre local development movements that took place in the decade of 1990, Adult Education often continued to be identified with two educational modalities of school type, the recurrent adult education and professional training”²¹.

In fact, in the opinion of the authors connected to the critical thoughts of the field, adult education was too attached to the school model and had essentially utilitarian and vocational purposes. Adult education was still, at that time, very attached to the idea of recurrent education, which was then in vogue internationally, and it presupposed a system of compensatory

¹⁸ R. Barros, *As políticas educativas para o sector da Educação de Adultos em Portugal: as novas instituições e processos educativos emergentes entre 1926-2006*, Lisboa, Chiado Editora, 2013, p. 153.

¹⁹ F. H. Belchior, *Educação de Adultos e Educação Permanente: a realidade portuguesa*, Lisboa, Livros Horizonte, 1990, p. 50.

²⁰ C. Rodrigues, A. Nóvoa, *Prefácio*, in R. Canário, B. Cabrito (Org.), *Educação e formação de adultos: mutações e convergências*, Lisboa, Educa, 2005, p. 9.

²¹ R. Barros, *Educação de Adultos: conceitos, processos e marcos históricos: da globalização ao contexto português*, Lisboa, Instituto Piaget, 2013, p. 113.

education. Nevertheless, although shrouded in some controversy, interesting experiences were developed, such as the alternative curricula and “capitalisable units” system. Both experiences questioned one of the major characteristics called “school grammar”, namely the consecration of a strict and uniform curriculum. These innovations were, however, counterbalanced by the strong school dropout, which affected recurrent education of young adults that did not have success in regular school. These young adults represented the main clientele of this form of teaching, and attended night courses arranged for this purpose. By way of critical assessing this moment of adult education in Portugal, Licínio Lima says the following: “Recurrent teaching, particularly in its school mode, and professional education will however be the emblematic elements of adult educational policies among the middle of the 1980s and 1990s, significantly causing the evacuation of the concept of adult education from the discourses and measures of the government’s educational policies”²².

6. Innovations of the transition period from the 20th century to the 21st century

The period represented by the last years of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty first century was perhaps one of the richest and challenging periods regarding adult education. The two most innovative options of the period were the creation of the courses of Adult Education and Training (EFA) in 2000 and the implementation of a Competence Recognition, Validation and Certification (RVCC) system from 2001 onwards. The new EFA courses, designed for young people over 18 years old, involved a dual certification, both educational and vocational; they had a Key-Competences’ Referential in Adult Education and Training as its central element; the starting point of the process implied the recognition and validation of the adults’ previously acquired competences; in addition, these courses had a modular structure, enabling individualized and differentiated learning paths. The RVCC led to the recognition, validation and certification of competences, which resulted from acquired experience throughout life in diverse contexts; each person’s experience was considered unique. This enabled the organization of a personal portfolio, and was viewed as a starting point for the definition of the additional required training; this certification ensured the social visibility of the training path. These options presupposed a more flexible approach of curriculum and implied breaking the traditional and rigid boundaries of the concept. As defined in the aforementioned Key-Competences’ Referential, the four areas of key competences regarding fundamental education were Language and Communication, Mathematics for Life, Information and Communication Technology and Citizenship and Employability, in addition to Vocational Training.

In 2005, a new government of the Socialist Party, led by José Socrates, began to develop a new ambitious and controversial project known as the New Opportunities Programme, with

²² L. Lima, *A Educação de Adultos em Portugal (1974-2004): entre as lógicas da educação popular e da gestão de recursos humanos*, in R. Canário, B. Cabrito (Org.), *Educação e formação de adultos: mutações e convergências*, Lisboa, Educa, 2005, p. 41.

the intent to generalize the above-mentioned experiences, particularly the RVCC system. This process was based on the New Opportunities Centres that were then created and which spread throughout the country. It was then devised a new Key-Competences' Referential for the so-called Secondary School (10th to 12th grades). At the same time, compulsory school was extended from the 9th grade, as it was defined in the Education Act of 1986, to the 12th grade, i.e., corresponding to the complete (upper) Secondary School. Unlike what happened in previous periods, a relatively high number of adults and young adults obtained their certification through these New Opportunities Centres. In the opinion of Cristina Rodrigues and António Nóvoa: "In this field, the work carried out in Portugal is very interesting, especially the ability to join "formal recognition" with life swings that are the opening acts of training programmes and personal and institutional development dynamics. The possibility to deepen devices that simultaneously articulate the recognition of educational and professional qualifications constitutes a desirable path for the coming years"²³. Nevertheless, some difficulties and limitations underlying this model were equally noted. As an example, Rita Barros points out the imprecise nature of the concept of experience, which is nuclear throughout this whole process, and the problematic character of the recognition by the public opinion of the diplomas obtained via the New Opportunities Centres.

7. Final considerations

Between 2011 and 2015, a new context created a situation of great uncertainty and ambiguity in the field of adult education. This context was dominated by the financial crisis and the implementation of an austerity programme, under the auspices of the so-called troika, and also with new players within the political power and another type of political-pedagogic discourse (liberal and conservative). In practice, this situation led to the suspension of the previously described processes, particularly regarding the New Opportunities initiative, now considered by the new power to be too expensive and lacking in rigour. We are once again facing the major discontinuities that traditionally characterized the policies of adult education in Portugal, which are marked by constant advances and setbacks. At the same time, we can notice the great dependence that these same policies had on the political context in a strict sense. This has led to the abandonment of certain projects at one time or another, including the prevailing guidelines and trends in the international arena, as soon as there is a change in government. This has established a certain vocabulary and set fashions that were soon followed by the Portuguese field of adult education. As pertinently noted by Cristina Rodrigues and António Nóvoa (2005): "Lifelong Education and Training is one of the most insistent rhetoric of the last few years"²⁴. The transition from the rhetorical plan to the educational reality plan is a permanent challenge that adult education is facing.

²³ C. Rodrigues, A. Nóvoa, *Prefácio*, in R. Canário, B. Cabrito (Org.), *Educação e formação de adultos: mutações e convergências*, Lisboa, Educa, 2005, pp. 12-13.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

Among the perspectives that have emerged in the field, even the most innovative, of which the RVCC's system and the New Opportunities' programme are an example, need to be questioned and problematized. The history of Adult education cannot become some sort of salvation narrative. The authors previously cited are exactly the ones that draw our attention to this risk regarding lifelong education and training, and the recognition and validation of experiences: "But it is necessary to warn against a "magical" or "administrative" thought that sometimes arises with it. As if it was enough to name these words so that they would transform themselves in the solution for the problems. As if the word "lifelong" could dismiss the appropriate training base. As if the "acquired recognition" could be based on an administrative logic of "formal certification" without a true personal implication on a process of reflection, personal learning and professional development. As if everything could be reduced to the political fixation of macro-goals or to an "active qualification" cosmetic... allowing everything to remain the same. It would not take long to wake up from this other illusion"²⁵.

The political transformations that occurred in the end of 2015 apparently created favourable conditions to rethink adult education according to some of the previously developed experiences. Some questions are still unanswered. To answer them we need the contribution of educational research, often despised by the political powers. It is thus particularly necessary to assume a critical posture towards the perspectives that reduce adult education to a continuous professional education by searching for solutions that would increase competitiveness and productivity according to the needs of the economy and the pressures of the work market. But it is also necessary to distance ourselves from the paradigm that, above all, holds the individual responsible for the process of his/her lifelong learning by removing the social dimension inherent to adult education. Using the words of Licínio Lima (2007), the achievement of the lifelong learning ideal implies recovering the "logics of popular adult education, civic education, communitarian and local development education, which are guided by a critical tradition of emancipation and 'awareness'"²⁶.

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