

## The Formal System of Adult Education in Italy from CTPs (1997) to CPIAs (2013/2014): an Inside View of the Situation

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### Abstract

*This paper describes as things stand about adult education policies in Italy. It analyzes the recent (legislative and organizational) transition from CTPs (Permanent Territorial Centers for education and training in adulthood, established in 1997) to CPIAs (Provincial Centers for adult education – above all in the sense of schooling – active since the school year 2013/2014), which represent the new institutional format about formal adult education. In particular, this article points out the subtended conception of education, of learning and of training for adults, and it analyzes material and intellectual resources devoted to this field. In fact, this reform is not free from criticism, both in terms of the pursued aims (degree completion to study the first cycle of education and certification attesting the basic skills acquisition, related compulsory education; obtaining technical, professional and artistic educational diploma; literacy courses and Italian language learning) and in terms of CPIAs users, which mostly coincide with the immigrant population. Although it is true that adult education is still needed, today, to remedy old and new illiteracy, it is also true that it must not neglect a less utilitarian dimension, which is dedicated to the planning and to cultural and existential enrichment, at large.*

**Keywords:** adult education; lifelong-lifewide learning; Italian educational policies; adults didactical approaches

### 1. Preliminary Remarks:

#### **Italian Political Background and Formal Adult Education System before 1997**

Referring to Italian policies of adult education and its sustainability (not only in financial and organizational terms, but also in cultural, social and educational perspective), the period herein considered is fairly short: it lasts about 17 years, from the Ministerial Ordinance no. 455, July 29, 1997 – which sets up CTPs (*Centri Territoriali Permanenti per l'istruzione e la formazione in età adulta; Permanent Territorial Centers for education and training in adulthood*) – until today – when it is starting the early experimentation of projects related to CPIAs (*Centri Provinciali per l'Istruzione degli adulti; Provincial Centers for adult education*) setting up, which involve and reformulate the whole structure up to now in force in this field.

However, although it is brief, it is a very complex period. On the one hand, in fact, European context has promoted many initiatives, communications, meetings, conferences and studies explicitly focused on adult education field in lifelong-longwide perspective, proposing guidelines implemented by Italy, both about the normative and institutional level and educational research<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, over the past 17 years Italian political situation has been very eventful: Italy has experienced a close alternation of governments, as expression of alternation of center-left and center-right political parties, including a transitional government.

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<sup>1</sup> Among the guiding documents which are incorporated by Italian legislation, the most important are: *Council Conclusions on a strategy for lifelong learning*, December 20, 1996 (97/C7/02); *Council Conclusions on local community development through education and training*, February 17, 1997 (97/C70/02); *Conclusions of National Conference "Learning in adulthood: a key for XXI Century"*, Florence, March 19-20, 1997, in view of Fifth International UNESCO Conference on Adult Education, Hamburg, July 14-18, 1997; *The Hamburg Declaration. The Agenda for the Future*, Fifth International Conference on Adult Education, Hamburg, July 14-18, 1997; *Recommendation of European Parliament and of Council on key competences for lifelong learning*, December 18, 2006; *Recommendation of European Parliament and of Council on the establishment of European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning*, April 23, 2008.

Narrowing down our attention to educational field, this situation coincided with the changing of eleven Council Presidencies (some of which are pertaining to the same person, for the second, third or fourth time, but intermittently) and eight Ministers “in educational field”; and it has to be noted that the name of Ministry has repeatedly changed from “Ministry of Public Education” (PI) to “Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR)”<sup>2</sup>. This summary can be useful to understand the reform framework: obviously, the instability of national politics has not guaranteed the development of organic and wide-ranging educational projects. Moreover, it is necessary to consider other factors: the cut of resources which can be assigned in public education system as a whole, and global financial crisis (increasing tax burden, increasing unemployment, falling in consumption). All these elements (not only in Italy) are bringing about a strong pressure on educational system, putting the stress on vocational education, or reinforcing as much as possible the connections between education and employability. Moreover (not only in Italy, but in Italy it is a massive and problematic issue), it must consider that Italy is an immigration zone, so much that to cause a considerable impact on educational system (school and adult education), requiring literacy courses (in the broadest sense), and training programs. Last but not least, it should be pointed out that Italian politicians never showed the hoped attention or consideration for the field of educational research, which aims not only to describe the educational processes and their implemented mechanisms, but, above all, it also aims to indicate ideal purposes, in a social and anthropological framework which does not end in economic and financial spheres, in the strict sense, nor which lends itself into slavish obedience to laws of market.

Finally, it should take a look at formal system of adult education situation before 1997: since 1964, it consisted essentially in evening classes taking place in high schools (once in vocational and technical schools, then in all high schools), in force until CPIAs starting. Over the decades, there have been other measures to support and to strengthen this field: the introduction of so-called “150 hours”: the right – once provided in metalworkers contract (CCNL, April 19, 1973) and then extended gradually to other workers categories – to avail 150 paid hours for educational courses, with particular reference, at least initially, to achieving a school-leaving qualification and/or a vocational qualification; the implementation of the so-called “SIRIO” projects (since 1995, in order to Legislative Decree no. 297, April, 16, 1994, *Approval of the unified code of laws in force in the field of education, relating to all levels schools*, Article no. 278) concerning the experimentation of integrated, flexible and modular courses for adults and young adults, aimed to achieving a school-leaving qualification and/or vocational qualification; and “A.L.I.FOR.T.I.” projects (since 1995, by an agreement between Ministry of Education and “GEPI-FOPRI”, *Consortium for the training and industrial requalification*). They are courses for dismissed workers or unemployed, which culminate in a vocational qualification that allows also to pursue further studies. In this regard, it was stressed that “As a whole, the two experimentations, besides representing the main training channel for adults, have introduced into the Italian education system some important simplifications specifically conceived to provide incentives for adult participation: shorter school hours compared to traditional morning courses, in order to make the timetable compatible with any family or work necessities, by putting together similar subjects and using a modular teaching methodology; a much more flexible organization of the academic calendar and of the plan of studies, by training groups of students of the same level instead of “traditional” closed classes and adopting courses of study based on the levels of knowledge of each single subject; integration with the Professional Training channel (which in Italy is a competence managed by the regions), to facilitate any changes from one field to another; recognition of educational credits, that is the evaluation of competences acquired both in formal courses of study (previous courses attended, or diplomas and certificates) and in informal courses of study (experience developed in afterschool environments) and which implies partial exemption from attending classes on certain subjects; the introduction of the figure of a tutor, dedicated to helping students in the delicate phase of scholastic introduction and settling in, often after many years of inactivity, and to making them acquire a method of study and learn the necessary strategies to compensate for understandable cultural lacks” (Cornacchia, 2012, pp. 34-35).

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<sup>2</sup>See following Ministers list since 1997 (it indicates Ministers’ names, Ministry’s names, Premiers’ names and periods: Luigi Berlinguer (PI; Romano Prodi and then Massimo D’Alema; 17/05/1996-25/04/2000); Tullio De Mauro (PI; Giuliano Amato; 25/04/2000-11/06/2001); Letizia Moratti (MIUR; 11/06/2001-17/05/2006; Silvio Berlusconi); Giuseppe Fioroni (PI; 17/05/2006-08/05/2008; Romano Prodi); Mariastella Gelmini (MIUR; 08/05/2008-16/11/2011; Silvio Berlusconi); Francesco Profumo (MIUR; 16/11/2011-28/04/2013; Mario Monti); Maria Chiara Carrozza (MIUR; 28/04/2013-22/02/2014; Enrico Letta); Stefania Giannini (MIUR; 22/02/2014-today; Matteo Renzi).

## **2. CTPs and Adult Educational Needs: Theoretical and Legislative Frameworks, Outcomes, and Critical Issues**

Beyond a systematic and accurate summary/description about CTPs instituting legislation, here it is mainly interesting focusing on the *ratio* of these measures and of some their fundamental aspects: objectives, specific educational needs which they intend to respond; educational activities; target groups.

With regard to identity of CTPs, the document specifies immediately their social and educational missions: “The Centers are configured as places of reading of needs, of planning, of consultation, of implementation and management of initiatives about education and training in adulthood, as well as documentation collection and dissemination” (Ministerial Ordinance no. 455, July, 29 1997; Article no. 1, paragraph 2) and it describes its own purpose: “Each Center provides a service aimed to combining right to education with right to guidance, re-guidance and vocational training. Therefore, in this context, the objectives of cultural and functional literacy, cultural consolidation and promotion, re-motivation and re-guidance, acquisition and consolidation of knowledge and skills, pre-professionalization and/or re-qualification are interrelated to each other” (Article no. 2, paragraph 1). It should be noted that CTPs are not only intended to supply to the training needs, but also – at least in the official declarations of intent – to stimulate and to promote training requests, carrying out a fairly complex range of activities: “welcoming, listening and guidance; elementary and functional literacy, also aimed to access to higher levels of education and vocational education; language and languages learning; development and consolidation of basic skills and of specific knowledge; recovery and development of instrumental, cultural and relational skills which are necessary for a full social participation; acquisition and development of early vocational training or re-training; involvement in vocational training and educational system of persons who live on the fringes of society” (Article no. 3, paragraph 1).

CTPs groups target are “all adults without compulsory schooling qualification, as well as those adults who, although they have obtained a qualification, intend again to involve themselves in educational and training system” (Article 3, paragraph 2); but also “no-adult”: “In view of purposes of juvenile uneasiness prevention and of promotion of educational success, and also in order to ensure the possibility of a real connection with vocational training and the labor market, the access is allowed to those who are 15 years old” (Article no. 3, paragraph 3). Among the users of CTPs educational proposal, adults detained in prison and young people in care juvenile detention are also included (Article no. 1, paragraph 6).

These exceptions allow discern in the establishment of CTP an educational role which, on the one hand, is clearly and closely connected with school, with its “weaknesses” (especially in terms of school dropout recovery) and with instrumental and functional literacy (particularly in reference to immigrant population). It is not by chance, in fact, that the access to CTPs activities is “priority guaranteed to those require the achievement of school qualification” (Article no. 3, paragraph 4), and that CTPs are a public school system “segment”, which finds its “educational and administrative staff reference” at primary school or at a school level I (Article no. 1, paragraph 7). Moreover, human and structural resources come from these school levels: CTPs staff consists of three primary school teachers and of five school level I teachers, the latter identified relating of following subject-matter: Italian; history; civics; geography; mathematics, chemical, physical and natural sciences; foreign language; technical education) (Article no. 4, paragraph 3). On the other hand, knowledge acquisition and compulsory school qualifications are primarily engaged in the labor market: what one expects and pursues is “an effective cultural and social integration” and that knowledge “supports and accompanies vocational training courses to facilitate the integration or re-integration into the labor market, in relation to the communication, planning, operational dimensions” (Article no. 5, paragraph 7) and, therefore, achievement of skills such as “flexibility, as changing and innovating readiness; viewpoints and realities analysis, as an approach to other cultures; systemic vision, as being able to place activities in overall organization; languages and most widespread technologies mastery; lifelong learning, as a learning and updated readiness; participative spirit, as ability to work with other people; self-criticism spirit, as self-evaluation ability” (Article no. 5, paragraph 8).

Since CTPs starting (in the school year 1997/1998), recurring and scrupulous monitoring were carried out, whose results gave rise to some important remarks.

In this respect, a study of Italian *Association TreeLLLe for a lifelong learning society (Life Long Learning)*, in reference to the INDIRE (National Institute of Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research) monitoring for the year school 2007/2008 (i.e., ten years apart), has taken over the most critical and worrying issues: a) 316,617 persons are involved in CTPs activities and 66,545 persons are involved in evening classes of higher secondary education: it is only 2.5% of about 12 million potential catchment persons, who have only junior high school qualification and of about 4 million of persons who have only primary school qualification b) participation at CTPs activities is markedly differentiated between Italian population and foreign population: Italians are present in the overwhelming majority (90%) in functional literacy courses (computer science, foreign languages, general cultural activities), and in a very limited extent in literacy classes (28%); foreigners are the main users of literacy classes (72%), while they are participating in a limited extent in functional literacy courses (TreeLLLe, 2010, pp. 120-125).

If it is true that this imbalance reflects the training needs triggered by the massive migratory flows, which was mentioned above, it is also true that it demonstrates an under-utilization and, at the same time, a CTPs deficiency: data are alarming insofar they are interpreted relating to the recent statistics by ISTAT (National Statistics Institute), according to which the estimates have pointed out that, relating to the population resident in Italy from 6 years of age, 782,342 persons are illiterate, and 5,199,237 persons are alphabets, but without any school qualification (ISTAT, 2008, p. 669). Moreover, referring to functional illiteracy level, the situation is even worse: according to research IALS-SIALS (Second International Adult Literacy Survey), developed by the OECD-OCDE in two sessions between 1994 and 2000, 34.6% of Italian population in the age group 16-65 years does not exceed the first level of functional literacy skill (“persons who possess a skill extremely weak, to the limits of illiteracy”). This element must be added to another element, regarding those persons who stop at the second level identified (“those who can read very simple texts, but who have difficulty in tackling new tasks and learning new skills”): the illiteracy percentage arrives at over even 60% (Gallina, 2001).

Paradoxically, the “strongest” persons are most facilitated to access to the CTPs educational opportunities, and the large number of foreign users only apparently contradicts this consideration: not only because a fair number of immigrants, despite they living in disadvantaged conditions, has medium-high educational qualifications, but also because they are conscious of the importance of certain subjects learning (Farinelli, 2004, p. 57).

Will be the transition from CTPs to CPIAs (as envisioned by the law and according to the national assisted projects experimentation) able to meet appropriately these critical issues?

### ***3. From CTPs to CPIAs: the Next Adult Education Organization with Respect to the European Lifelong Learning Trends***

The interpretation put forward here obviously does not refer to educational quality of each CTP and to its positive achievements. Rather, it refers to a formal system of adult education and lifelong learning, as a whole, which requires structural remedies and additional and substantial (material and cultural) resources, beyond mere literacy actions, both in perspective of school subsidiarity in traditional sense, and mere vocational training, in order to offer a wider variety of educational options, and in order to qualify, through implementation and development, three fundamental dimensions of all territorial Centers for adult education (whatever name they may assume in different countries): “local society development, network, involving participation of stakeholders” (Orefice, 2000).

The procedure for CPIAs setting up was very long: it was announced in 2006 – into a measure that was not sent out by the Ministry of Education: it was, however, paragraph no. 632 among the 1364 paragraphs of the only article of Law December 27, 2006 no. 296 *Provisions for the preparation of the annual and multi-annual national budget* (called “2007 Financial Bill”)<sup>3</sup>, signed by Minister of Economics and Finance – and it was postponed from year to year until the present day.

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph reads as follows: “[...] in order to achieve higher levels of education for adult population, including immigrants, with particular reference to learning Italian language, the Permanent Territorial Centers for adult education and the evening classes, working at schools of all levels, are reorganized by province and territorial networks, and they are re-named ‘Provincial Centers for adult education’. Administrative, organizational and teaching autonomy and their own staff separate from that of ordinary schools are assigned to them”.

This Law was followed by: a) Ministerial Decree October 25, 2007, which defined general criteria for autonomy assignment to CPIAs; it was Law August 6, 2008, no. 133 (again an economic-financial measure), which affirms: “*redefinition of organizational-educational centers for adult education, including evening courses, under current regulations*”<sup>4</sup>; b) *Regulation scheme laying down the general rules governing restructuring of the organization of educational centers of adult education, including evening courses, under current regulations pursuant to Article 64, paragraph 4, of Legislative Decree June 25, 2008 no. 112, with amendments, by Law of August 6, 2008 no. 133*; and, finally, the *Regulation* in its final version (October 29, 2012 Presidential Decree no. 263, in force since February 25, 2013).

The changes regard: CPIA identity, training and educational organization, teaching aspects, activities. In respect to the management and administrative aspects, CPIA is an independent educational institution, structured normally by province, which offers activities aimed to achieving school and vocational qualifications; it is equipped with its own staff; it has the same Board of schools; it is organized so as to link to local governments and labor market; it realizes its educational program through learning levels (Article no. 2).

As for the users, it is established that: “adults (also foreign adults), who have not completed compulsory school or who are not in possession of qualification, can enroll”; “there is the possibility for working age foreign adults, in possession of qualifications obtained to their home countries, to enroll themselves in literacy and Italian language courses”; “Sixteen, who are not in possession of the first cycle of education qualification, can enroll”; “if there are specific and justified reasons, Fifteen can enroll”; and “adults, including foreigners, who are in possession of the first cycle of education qualification, Sixteen, and who is in possession of the first cycle of education qualification, if they demonstrate that they could not attend the daytime courses, can enroll” (Article no. 3).

Courses and qualifications are: a) first-level courses, aimed to achievement the first cycle of education and certification attesting the acquisition of basic skills related compulsory school b) second-level courses, aimed to achievement the technical, vocational and artistic qualification, (but they are potentially extensible to other high school qualification). Both courses (a and b) are subdivided into more teaching periods, which correspond to partial skills certification, while the compulsory overall time is 400 hours for the first-level courses, and, for the second-level, 70% of that provided by traditional school. Finally, literacy and learning of Italian language courses are activated, addressed to foreign adults, aimed to achieve Italian language A2 qualification, referring to Common European Framework for Languages by Council of Europe (Article no. 4, paragraphs 1-7).

In order to teaching sustainability, some tools were planned: a) credits, in any way acquired by students for admission at the courses, are evaluated, b) personal study program is doable though an “Individual Training Pact”; c) e-learning courses, not more than 20% of overall time; d) welcoming and guidance activities, aimed at “Individual Training Pact”, no more than 10% of overall time (Article no. 4, paragraph 9).

In this new organizational and teaching structure, there are obvious positive aspects: firstly, the unification of activities by province and, secondly, administrative, managerial and teaching autonomy, such as to provide, also, its own staff.

Nevertheless, at least in theory, some problems arise, such as to undermine both the quality of the adult education reform and the sustainability of its new structure. In fact, in teaching and learning perspective, it should be noted that CPIAs activity is reduced compared to the previous CTPs activity: it is essentially limited to *schooling* aimed to achieve qualification and to learning Italian language, neglecting other options, and taking shape as “adult schooling”; then, it is equally important the percentage proportion between teachers and students, which set insofar as 10 teachers per 120 students for CTP, and 10 teachers per 160 students for CPIA (Article no. 9, paragraph 2).

In terms of educational policy, and despite the constant declarations of intent which extolling the need to strengthen initiatives in adult education and lifelong learning, involving progressively larger strata of the population, the Law is binding on contraction of financial resources, such that it does not absolutely consider the hoped increase of users – compared to CTPs previous experience, that already had this sore point – which would be necessary for economic, cultural, and social progress.

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<sup>4</sup> Law August 6, 2008, no. 133, Conversion into law, with modifications, of Decree-Law June, 25 2008, no. 112, containing urgent measures for economic development, simplification, competitiveness, stabilization of public finance and tax equalization (Article 64, Paragraph 4, Letter f).

The words “without new and greater expenses charged to public finances” occur frequently in the Law: this obligation inevitably affects also the positive aspects which seemed to consider adult learning specificities (formal, non-formal and informal credits; personalized courses; qualitative criteria, and not merely quantitative) for level groups, ICT for e-learning; and the “weight” of welcoming and guidance activities. If these strategies must be “zero cost”, many doubts arise about sustainability of the project as a whole. As it has been noted, the transition from CTPs to CPIAs seems to be explained in terms of “rationalization and reduction of expenses” and not in terms of “construction of a new adult education system, as decisive segment for adult education in our Country” (TreeLLLe, 2010, p. 128), considering the acquisition of elementary skills (basic knowledge, languages) not the satisfaction of needs of lifelong learning, but its “springboard”.

But it is in the transition from an analysis of the CPIAs legislation to an analysis of CPIAs experimentations that it will get useful elements able to confirm or not confirm these critical issues and to allow increased depth of analysis.

This experimentation is in progress, and we are waiting for the data from the pilot project called “Ten steps towards CPIAs” which involves ten Italian provinces<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> See Assisted projects at national level (DPR 263/1, Article no. 11, Paragraph 1) “10 Steps towards CPIAs”, document containing instructions for implementation of the actions which make up assisted projects at the national level (note no. 4241, July 31, 2013).