

UNESCO, Adult education and political mobilization

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Since World War II, the work done by inter-state organizations has created a shift in social imaginaries with regard to the relation between education, work, and the socio-economic development of nation-states¹. These imaginaries materialized in a ‘global polity’², namely the mobilization of a set of social actors toward the governance of a common object. This object (here adult education) is made the explicit subject of political action based on de-territorialized norms. An exemplary case is the *Belèm Framework for Action*,³ the consolidated version of which was adopted by the VI International Conference on Adult Education (hereafter CONFINTEA VI), held in 2009 in Belèm (Brazil), under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The *Belèm Framework for Action*⁴ lays out prescriptive activities to be implemented at either national or international level within five areas: adult literacy, learners’ participation, quality of provision, governmental policy and global governance. In so doing, it focuses attention on the development of comparable statistical indicators, benchmarks and monitoring mechanisms for member states, developmental and aid agencies, and UNESCO with

¹ Milana, 2012.

² Corry, 2010.

³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2009.

⁴ UNESCO, 2009.

a view to examining systematic progress. In particular, member states commit to establish regular monitoring mechanisms, including data collection, and the production of a triennial report on national progress; while UNESCO receives a mandate to coordinate the monitoring of progress at global level, and to produce a monitoring report, the *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*,⁵ on a triennial basis.

The *Belèm Framework for Action*⁶ is the result of mobilization processes that have slowly but steadily occurred over time under the auspices of UNESCO, also thanks to the International Conferences on Adult Education, which have been organized every 12 years since 1949. These conferences, funded by member states, gather representatives from governments, academia, and other national and international entities, including non-governmental organizations, and represent a second level of political decision making within UNESCO (the first level being the annual executive board and general conference sessions), at least at the level of intentions, as no international legal instrument exists that binds states to undertake specific action in the field of adult education within the territories under their exclusive sovereignty.

At the level of intentions, these conferences have provided a forum over the years for the setting of international norms for adult education policy and practices, norms whose appeal has varied from one national context to the next, but which have contributed to the transformation of adult education from a national policy matter into an issue of global governance, as testified by the *Belèm Framework for Action*.⁷

It is the scope of this paper to increase our understanding of the working of global governance in adult education by examining the type of mobilization processes that occur via interactions between UNESCO and other political actors, and how these processes have led to the creation of standard-setting and monitor-

⁵ UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) 2009, 2012.

⁶ UNESCO, 2009.

⁷ Ibid.

ing instruments, like the *Belém Framework for Action*⁸ and the *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*.⁹

In what follows, I introduce UNESCO as a state-led actor with a capacity for norm-making at a global level, but with a limited mandate for concrete implementation, and contend that its role, methods and channels for mobilizing political will toward a global agenda in adult education have been under-researched. Then I present the theoretical and methodological framing for this study, before presenting its findings. By adopting a global polity perspective, the findings point at three concurrent processes or modes of mobilization in adult education, which I have termed: *landmarking*, *brokering* and *framing*. *Landmarking* refers to the process of co-constructing a shared past for a broad set of actors with an interest in shaping policy in adult education; *brokering* captures the process of supporting the transaction of values, ideas and information to envision a viable future for adult education; and finally *framing* addresses the structuring of information and intentions to produce material changes at governmental level in the field of adult education. Drawing on different data sources, I present and discuss a few of the incidences and visible marks of each mode.

UNESCO as a global actor

Scholarly attention to global governance, as Wise and Wilkinson¹⁰ note, has given primacy to core institutions for economic and social development, like the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the European Union (EU), or the World Bank, just to mention a few, rather than institutions dealing with “some of the ‘softest’ issues normally classified under the rubric of ‘low politics’”¹¹ like UNESCO.

⁸ Ibid., 2009.

⁹ UIL 2003, 2013.

¹⁰ Wise and Wilkinson, 2011.

¹¹ Ibid., p. xvii.

Established in 1946 to promote peace and security based on international understanding and human welfare via education, science and culture, “in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms, which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion”, as stated in article I, paragraph 1 of its constitution, UNESCO represents today 195 states and 8 associate members distributed over five world regions. A shared concern for education by national ministries informed its very foundation, and education made up 1/3 of its regular budget in 2011. Still, as Singh¹² claims, while “[it] comes before anything else at UNESCO... Education also remains the Achilles heel of the organization”, not least due to its organization and mode of working. A specialized agency of the United Nations (UN), with budgetary autonomy, UNESCO is a state-led organization similar, for instance, to the OECD, as its regular budget derives from states’ dues. However, these dues have been progressively rivaled by extra budgetary resources from multilateral development donors, and more recently also private organizations.¹³ Besides a general conference, deliberating and voting, and an executive board guiding its agenda, both comprised of member state representatives, UNESCO has a secretariat or international civil service implementing the organization’s mandate, and draws on intellectuals, experts and academics to provide inputs to its reports. However, unlike other state-led organizations, under its constitution UNESCO maintains strong links with non-governmental organizations that are crucial for the implementation of its programs.

Thanks to its broad constitutional mission and encompassing agenda, grounded in a humanist philosophy, and its strong links to civil society, UNESCO is generally perceived (and conceives itself) as an intellectual and philosophical think-tank. But its large area of specialization when compared to other UN specialized agencies, coupled with limited strength in its legal instruments

¹² Singh, 2011, p. 46.

¹³ Ibid.

and generally inadequate resources, hampers the accomplishment of its mandate. Thus Singh argues

As an important global institution, UNESCO has enormous intellectual capacities to deliberate the most complex of global problems related to constructing the defenses of peace in the minds of human beings.¹⁴

However, such “enduring strength” is diluted in practice by “pressure from its constituencies”.¹⁵ Such pressure revolves around external restrictions by donors via monitoring and evaluation procedures, national and regional politics that often hit UNESCO’s agenda, internal bureaucracy, and sectorial competition for economic resources. Responsibilities in adult education, for instance, are a prerogative of UNESCO’s Institute for Education (UIE). But the headquarters coordinates activities under the United Nations Literacy Decade, UNLD, UNESCO’s Institute for Statistics deals with the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP), while the International Bureau of Education and UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning coordinate Education for All (EFA), which may cause in-house rivalry for resources across these institutions.

Established in 1951 as a foundation under German civil law, the UIE used to be heavily financed by the German government until it turned into a fully-fledged UNESCO institute in 2007, changing its legal name to the UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning (UIL). Such a change in status has resulted in an internal restructuring and adjustment of the institute’s overall strategy, with dramatic budgetary variations in terms of line of financing, overall revenues and expenditure, and a consequent stronger dependency on UNESCO headquarters in economic, administrative, and ideational terms.

Acknowledgment of the influence of inter-state organizations on the conceptualizations and policy development of adult education has led to a proliferation of studies that look at the work-

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 19.

ings of these organizations, their efforts in legitimizing specific interests and shaping international agendas,¹⁶ through the adoption of new governance mechanisms,¹⁷ and the promotion of a monitoring culture.¹⁸ Such studies have often drawn on literature on globalization, governance and education emphasizing Europeanization,¹⁹ and ‘governance by numbers’;²⁰ but tend to give primacy to the EU or the OECD rather than UNESCO.

UNESCO is studied instead for its conceptual contribution to the forming of a radical education project based on a humanistic approach,²¹ a forerunner of more modern conceptions of lifelong learning;²² and it is analyzed in terms of its ideological drives and shifts,²³ or the characterization of its policy discourse, when compared to those put forward by other organizations.²⁴ Accordingly, UNESCO’s policy strategy has been put under scrutiny;²⁵ as have the debates under its auspices and whether they have resulted in concrete change over time.²⁶ But the process through which mobilization occurs via interactions between UNESCO and other political actors (especially from civil society) remains under-explored.

A global polity stand

Despite evidence of increasing global governance in adult education, and acknowledgement of governance mechanisms that include but are not reducible to political action by national governments, how are we to comprehend the process through which

¹⁶ Milana and Holford, 2014; Panitsidou, 2013, forthcoming; Rubenson, 2006, 2009, forthcoming.

¹⁷ Jacobi, 2009; Ioannidou, 2007.

¹⁸ Hamilton, 2014; Tett, 2014.

¹⁹ Nóvoa and Lawn, 2002; Lawn and Grek 2012.

²⁰ Martens and Niemann, 2010; Grek, Lawn, Lindgard and Varjo, 2009.

²¹ Wain, 2001.

²² Mohorčič Špolar and Holford, 2014.

²³ Moosung and Friedrich, 2011.

²⁴ Milana, 2013.

²⁵ Lima and Guimarães, 2011.

²⁶ Preece, 2013.

mobilization around adult education as a policy matter occurs via interactions between UNESCO and other political actors?

There is no doubt that turning adult education into a joint matter that mobilizes differential policy is a delicate process of authoritative allocation of values,²⁷ which is no longer constrained within national or geographical borders, but is rather embedded in complex dynamics. Dynamics that are characterized by asymmetry and unevenness, and that occur via ‘nodes of interactions’ among diverse actors with policy volition, across time and space, on multiple levels and scales.²⁸ Capturing these dynamics requires full recognition of a global dimension in adult education policy work or “‘meta-narrative’ that needs to be picked apart to see the work that it does in any one context”.²⁹ Such a meta-narrative incorporates ontological changes influenced by ideational and discursive practices that gain legitimacy on different scales.

UNESCO’s intellectual and philosophical capacities have succeeded in creating a meta-narrative about the universalization of human rights. The 1945 UN Charter laid the foundations for “the regime of international legal instruments that today prescribe what this [human rights] means in terms of specific rights across a wide array of circumstances”.³⁰ Article 26 states that “Everybody has the right to education... Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”. It is this kind of meta-narrative that influences a new ontology (i.e. education is what makes human human), informing ideational and discursive practices about adult education, as evidenced in the *Recommendation on the development of adult education*,³¹ where adult education is conceived as “a fundamental aspect of the right to education”. Ideational and discursive practices about adult education within UNESCO have

²⁷ Easton, 1953.

²⁸ Cerny, 2001; Robertson, 2012.

²⁹ Robertson, 2012, p. 5.

³⁰ Kinsley, 2009, p. 12.

³¹ UNESCO, 1976, p. 1.

changed over time,³² in parallel with overall shifts in focus about education more broadly conceived (i.e. fundamental education, measures against discrimination, functional literacy, lifelong education, technical and vocational education, global education targets). But in order to show how these gain legitimacy on different scales, it is necessary to identify the concreteness of mobilization processes through multi-actor interactions.

Socio-political and ethnographic contributions have exposed, for instance, how policy work occurs through material and ideational sites to form global imaginaries that homogenize values, beliefs and ideas about education,³³ yet also create niches for re-imagining local specificities.³⁴ In particular, socio-political studies shed light on how a social concern turns into a political issue via the mobilities of people, ideas and economic resources on a global level,³⁵ thus pointing at the reach of policy processes that impinge not only on a ‘global education’ agenda,³⁶ but also on diverse sites of political power.³⁷ This confirms that global interconnectivity in education produces a ‘policyscape’, which synthesizes flows ideas across and beyond national contexts. However, resistance to, and contestation of, such ideas also open new spaces for local re-imaginings.³⁸

Adult education as “a fundamental aspect of the right to education”, for instance, may be equated to a global imaginary that tends toward the homogenization of values, beliefs and ideas about adult education. However, when we look at official accounts in response to specific calls by UNESCO, summarized in recent *Global Reports on Adult Learning and Education*,³⁹ what emerges are examples of national re-imaginings. In some parts of the world adult education is mostly equated with the oppor-

³² Wain, 2001; Milana, 2013; Elfert, 2013; Ireland and Spezia, 2012.

³³ Rizvi and Lingard, 2010.

³⁴ Carney, 2009, 2011.

³⁵ Rizvi, 2009.

³⁶ Rizvi and Lingard, 2010.

³⁷ Ozga, 2000; Ball 2012.

³⁸ Carney, 2009, 2011.

³⁹ UIL, 2009, 2013.

tunities for underserved groups of citizens to increase their literacy, for instance in countries that have experienced socio-political turmoil for most of their history as independent nations in Africa or the Arab region. In other parts of the world, Northern America and Europe for instance, adult education is mainly technical in nature and involves vocational training for young people and adults who are experiencing difficulties in getting or retaining work, resulting from either low personal educational achievement or major changes in the labour markets. Adult education is also used to integrate immigrants. Finally, even though the primary aim of adult education in some parts of the world is to boost levels of literacy, other understandings of its purpose are also being incorporated gradually (technical and vocational training, for instance) in line with the development of democratic processes or economic expansion – in Latin America, Asia and elsewhere.⁴⁰ However, these accounts primarily reflect governmental views and understandings.

Anthropological studies, instead, have brought to the foreground the policy will of a multiplicity of actors beyond the purview of governments. They did so by giving voice to human beings situated across levels and spaces, thus negotiate global understandings and ideas in specific localities.⁴¹ But rather than focusing specifically on the human materiality by which a policy is enacted, these studies also question how it is conceived via global processes. To this end, some suggest looking at policies not only as tools of government but also as tools for studying the very systems of governance they create,⁴² which theoretically assigns agency to a policy while expanding the ‘field’ of study beyond physical sites, thus including sociological and political issues that constitute such a policy matter. Accordingly, the interactions of agents, concepts and technologies that occur across sites reveal ‘policy worlds’ that produce, reinforce or resist governance mechanisms.⁴³

⁴⁰ Milana, forthcoming.

⁴¹ Levinson, Sutton and Winstead, 2009.

⁴² Shore and Wright, 1997.

⁴³ Shore, Wright and Però, 1997.

When we scratch the surface of official accounts and familiarize ourselves with public adult education policy in different countries, talking with bureaucrats, academics, and activists in international non-governmental organizations and grassroots organizations that have connections to UNESCO, we get hints of the local negotiations of the global understandings and ideas around adult education as a fundamental aspect of the right to education. For instance, in Argentina adult education is legally defined as a teaching modality which is equal to other forms of teaching with a view to guaranteeing the ‘right to education’ asserted by national law; but bureaucrats as well as academics criticize the *Belém Framework for Action*⁴⁴ for representing a hegemonic position that does not reflect local realities and needs. In North America, by federal law, adult education is a program or service offered to people but not a right that people have; and bureaucrats refuse to acknowledge the idea of education as a human right. Even so, the demonstrations organized by adult educators against the governor’s decision to cut California’s state funds for adult education were held under the slogan: “Education is a Human Right!”

So how do we integrate and explain mobilities and smooth transitions of ideas that de-territorialize but also trigger opposite processes of fixity and re-bordering of values, beliefs and ideas? And how do we articulate non-human ‘agency’, as well as its interactions with people, in ways that can be empirically grasped?

Methodological suggestions can be found in multi-sited ethnographies that pay simultaneous attention to both horizontal and vertical interactions⁴⁵ and unbound fieldwork from a single place and time to delve into external forces that are either resisted or accommodated by people,⁴⁶ as well as in an ‘actor-network sensibility’,⁴⁷ with a view to articulating artifacts not as simple carriers

⁴⁴ UNESCO, 2009.

⁴⁵ Vavrus and Bartlett, 2009.

⁴⁶ Burawoy, Blum, George, Gille, Gowan, Haney, Klawiter, Lopez, Ó Ríain and Thaye, 2000.

⁴⁷ Fenwick and Edwards, 2010.

of ‘symbolic projection’, but also as participants in a course of action.⁴⁸

This article has presented an extremely simplified account of the different understandings that a multi-site and multi-actor focus can open up for, when considering, for instance, UNESCO’s core assumption of adult education as a human right.

In this line of argument, drawing on the literature, a global polity stand allows us to think afresh about adult education as a matter of public policy concern, neither within nor outside, but across geo-political borders and professional interests. Such a proposal builds on two basic assumptions. First, a global polity⁴⁹ happens in adult education just as much as in other areas of public concern and governance. However, it is distinct because its intention is to govern the education of adults (and young people who were unsuccessful at school) rather than governing primary, secondary or tertiary education. Second, while the term ‘global polity’ encompasses the *gestalt* of a social phenomenon, its empirical investigation is dependent on observations of the ‘global polity structure’, or the organization of and relations between the elements that compose such a *gestalt*.

In short, a global polity structure exists when a given set of actors shares a basic understanding of one world that incorporates both global and local horizons of political action which expand vertically and horizontally.⁵⁰ Its orientation results from the interactions between agents, concepts and technologies that happen in local, national, regional and international environments, and is often objectified in events such as conferences, official meetings, or artifacts such as written texts, videos or still images.⁵¹ A global polity structure is kept alive by interactions between human and non-human agencies that are not bound to either vertical

⁴⁸ Latour 2005, p. 10.

⁴⁹ Corry, 2010.

⁵⁰ Carney, 2011; Rizvi and Lingard, 2010; Robertson, 2012; Vavrus and Bartlett, 2009.

⁵¹ Shore, Wright and Però, 1997.

or horizontal perspectives or single or multiple environments.⁵² It should be noted, however, that human agents may have obligations, capacities, or preferences to interact primarily in single or multiple environments, with either vertical or horizontal perspectives; while events and artifacts may simply carry crystallized meanings or rather contribute to their transformation, distortion or modification.⁵³ Consistently with the above perspective, UNESCO represents a nodal point in such a global polity structure, and so does the UIE, the core UNESCO institute when it comes to adult education. For instance, the UIL's primary obligation is strongly tied, horizontally, to UNESCO headquarters, member states and associate members, including international non-governmental organizations like the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) since 2012. However, the UIL can potentially reach out, vertically, to local and national relevant actors via UNESCO's national commissions. These are agencies for consultation and coordination which facilitate communication between UNESCO and its member states; but these relations are filtered by national governments, which set up these commissions. Accordingly, by its very nature, interaction between the UIL and other political bodies toward which it has formal obligations, inasmuch as additional interactions with consultative bodies, and individual experts, tends toward the homogenization of beliefs, guiding norms, values and ideas. But in doing so it also creates heterogeneity, for instance when the UIL contests alternative world-views promoted under the auspices of other inter-state organizations,⁵⁴ or the UIL's own view is ignored or resisted at either international, national or local scales.⁵⁵ It is this perspective that informed the data gathering and analysis carried out in this project.

⁵² Burawoy et al., 2000; Latour, 2005.

⁵³ Latour, 2005.

⁵⁴ Milana, 2012; 2013.

⁵⁵ Nesbit and Welton, 2013.

Data sources and analysis

The analysis draws on data gathered within an ongoing project (GLOBE-A) that investigates the politics of adult education at the intersection between international, national and local scales. Although the project adopts a multi-sited and multi-actor approach, this contribution is informed primarily by data gathered during a four-week stay at the UIL (January 2013), where I observed a staff meeting and video conference with UNESCO headquarters and had informal interactions with staff members. An additional data source consists of interviews held with six UIL staff members. Both sources provided rich data on the functioning of the institute, its historical development and current policy and advocacy work on adult education. But they contain highly sensitive information, so no explicit reference to this data source is included, in order to protect the identities and views of those concerned. A third source of data is scientific and professional literature on policy and advocacy work in the field of adult education. This data source led to the identification of journals, institutions and individuals that dealt with policy-relevant events, activities and publications under the auspices of UNESCO. A fourth data source is official webpages, policy documents and publications by UNESCO, the UIL and the European Union, which served different functions. On the one hand this data reports about official decisions, budget allocations and institutional strategies; on the other hand it reflects discursive elements that promote institutional values, beliefs and ideas about adult education. All the data was analyzed using heuristic tools developed by second-generation grounded theory, and using situational analysis, which makes use of word-by-word or sentence-by-sentence open coding, labeling, constant comparisons for categorizations, but also visual synthesis of both coded and ‘somewhat digest data’ to prompt further analytical insights and interpretations.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Clarke, 2005.

Modes of mobilizing political will

As already mentioned, in this paper I focus my attention on the means by which the mobilization of political will (at both horizontal and vertical levels) occurs via UNESCO and the UIL, and how these processes lead to the creation of standard-setting and monitoring instruments that support global governance in adult education. Three modes of mobilization emerged from the data:

1. *Landmarking*: This is the process of co-constructing a common past in adult education, which is recognizable by diverse political actors. Its incidence can be found in a limited number of events and publications that are used to mark stages of development or turning points in the promotion of adult education as a public and global concern. Visible marks of broadly acknowledged landmarks include the reports by UNESCO, *Learning to be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow*,⁵⁷ and *Learning: The Treasure Within*,⁵⁸ and the V International Conference on Adult Education (Hamburg, 1997 – hereafter CONFINTEA V) with its outcome documents: the *Hamburg declaration* and the *Agenda for the future*.⁵⁹
2. *Brokering*: This is the process of supporting the transfer of values, ideas and information between individual and collective agents that makes it possible to envision a viable future for adult education. Its incidence can be identified in specific technologies that facilitate exchanging and diffusing meanings, the visible marks of which include the International Conferences on Adult Education, and the extensive activities that occur before and after these conferences, like preparatory and follow-up meetings, the manufacturing and circulation of background and working documents, and post-conference publications. This process has

⁵⁷ Fauré and International Commission on the Development of Education, 1972.

⁵⁸ Delors Delors, J. and International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century 1996.

⁵⁹ UNESCO, 1997.

received a boost since the mid-90s thanks to a progressively stronger involvement of non-governmental organizations.

3. *Framing*: This is the process of structuring information and political intentions in an attempt to produce material changes at governmental level. Its incidence involves governance mechanisms that set standards and institutional responsibilities and describe processes and practices. Visible marks are the 1976 UNESCO *Recommendation on the development of adult education*,⁶⁰ the *Belém Framework for Action*,⁶¹ and related monitoring tools such as the *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*.⁶²

These modes of mobilization are illustrated in further detail and discussed in the proceedings.

Landmarking: Co-constructing a unifying past

One of the intellectual and philosophical contributions broadly credited to UNESCO is the report of the International Commission on the Development of Education entitled *Learning to be: The world of education today and tomorrow*,⁶³ headed by former French Prime Minister and Minister of Education Edgar Fauré. The report epitomizes the work that had been carried out with regard to the concept of ‘lifelong education’ under the auspices of the UIE at a time of active leadership in setting the organizing principle for educational development.⁶⁴ It is acknowledged as an ‘important planning document’ in UNESCO’s history.⁶⁵

Four basic assumptions underlay our work from the start... The first... is the existence of an international community which... is reflected in common aspirations, problems and trends, and in its movement towards one and the same destiny... The second is belief in democracy, conceived of as implying each man’s right

⁶⁰ UNESCO, 1976.

⁶¹ UNESCO, 2009,

⁶² UIL, 2009, 2012.

⁶³ Fauré et al. 1972.

⁶⁴ Tuijnman and Boström, 2002.

⁶⁵ Singh, 2011, p. 56.

to realize his own potential and to share in the building of his own future... The third... is that the aim of development is the complete fulfillment of man... Our last assumption is that only an overall, lifelong education can produce the kind of complete man...⁶⁶

Fauré and his colleagues believed in a renewed approach to education ‘beyond the reform of educational systems’;⁶⁷ so they were advocating for education as a community project. While such a radical approach was not universally accepted, as Wain⁶⁸ notes, it did fit with de-schooling and de-institutionalization stands of the time,⁶⁹ and it was broadly embraced by adult educators, not least because, as Schuetze⁷⁰ observes, it “formulated the philosophical-political concept of a humanistic, democratic and emancipatory system of learning opportunities for everybody, independent of class, race or financial means, and independent of the age of the learner”. Thirty years later the Fauré report is still referred as ‘the canonical text of the lifelong education movement’,⁷¹ and although its radical message has lost UNESCO’s backing over time, the report did form the platform for the III International Conference on Adult Education (Tokyo, 1972). By promoting the expansion of adult education and the innovation of its methods in support of democratization processes, this conference turned adult education into a serious worldwide policy matter; which set the scene for UNESCO’s directorate general to be authorized to do policy work in support of its member states; leading to the *Recommendation on the development of adult education*,⁷² adopted by the UNESCO general conference, to which I will return.

At a two-decade distance from the publication of the Fauré report, UNESCO convened a Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century chaired by the former president of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, so the organization could

⁶⁶ Fauré et al. 1972, p. v-vi.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 9.

⁶⁸ Wain, 2001.

⁶⁹ Moosung and Friedrich, 2011.

⁷⁰ Schuetze, 2006, p. 290.

⁷¹ Wain, 2001, p. 184.

⁷² UNESCO, 1976.

regain its international visibility within the educational policy arena.⁷³ This kind of new intellectual and philosophical effort resulted in *Learning: The Treasure Within*.⁷⁴ The report addressed a few tensions of the time which could be overcome through education (i.e. local vs. global, universal vs. individual, tradition vs. modernity, long-term vs. short-term action, competition vs. opportunities for learning, expanding vs. assimilating knowledge, spiritual vs. material aspects).⁷⁵ The core vision of Delors and his colleagues was spelled out as the ‘four pillars of education’:

- Learning to live together, by understandings of others and of interdependence;
- Learning to know, by combining general and in-depth/specific education;
- Learning to do, by acquiring competence in dealing with a variety of situations;
- Learning to be, by unleashing personal talents or the ‘treasure in every person’ to exert interdependence and judgment, combined with personal responsibility.⁷⁶

The last pillar explicitly refers back to and reaffirms the core message in the Fauré report. Critical readings point at inner tensions within the Delors report between the infiltration of neoliberal ideas (i.e. skills updating), and its attempt to preserve a social-democratic liberal approach that reconciles economic growth with equity issues, respect for the human condition and the environment, and reaffirms the central role of the welfare state, at a time when this was being questioned by the expansion of neoliberal thinking in education, for instance within the OECD.⁷⁷ In short, the report constituted a ‘philosophical treatise’ rather than a practical document to deal with concrete educational issues such as low literacy rates worldwide.⁷⁸ It is precisely

⁷³ Jones, 2005.

⁷⁴ Delors et al., 1996.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 15–16.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 20–21.

⁷⁷ Milana, 2012; Moosung and Friedrich, 2011; Rubenson, 2009.

⁷⁸ Sing, 2011.

for its intellectual potentials, however, and despite its ideological contradictions, that the report offered a rich basis for adult education policy debates on which CONFINTEA V took off.

CONFINTEA V, held in Hamburg in 1997, occurred at a time when industrial expansion and economic development had been followed by a major economic crisis that had hit much of the world in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Accordingly, as noted elsewhere, the conference

... concentrated its attention on sustainable development – a form of development that would be not only ecologically sustainable, but also scientifically and socially sustainable, thus promoting social justice and gender equity.⁷⁹

This is echoed in its outcome document, the *Hamburg declaration on adult learning*,⁸⁰ by stating that

Adult education thus becomes more than a right; it is a key to the twenty-first century. It is both a consequence of active citizenship and a condition for full participation in society. It is a powerful concept for fostering ecologically sustainable development, for promoting democracy, justice, gender equity, and scientific, social and economic development, and for building a world in which violent conflict is replaced by dialogue and a culture of peace based on justice. Adult learning can shape identity and give meaning to life. Learning throughout life implies a rethinking of content to reflect such factors as age, gender equality, disability, language, culture and economic disparities.⁸¹

In line with this thinking, the annexed *Agenda for the future* puts special emphasis on democratic participation, access, literacy skills, the right to work and health and environmental care as core areas in which adult learning can play a vital role,⁸² and devotes an entire paragraph to reaffirming the validity of the intellectual and philosophical elaborations put forward in *Learn-*

⁷⁹ Milana, 2012, p. 112.

⁸⁰ UNESCO, 1997.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 1997, p. 1.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 1997, p. 9.

*ing to be*⁸³ and *Learning: The Treasure Within*,⁸⁴ namely a conception of learning throughout life that goes beyond traditional distinctions between initial and continuing education, as key for the fulfilling of one's potential, and the importance of the four pillars for its full achievement.

It is my first claim here that *Learning to be*, *Learning: The Treasure Within* and *CONFINTEA V* (with its outcome documents) represent key visible marks of how events and publications under the auspices of UNESCO and/or the UIL have come to represent ideational landmarks for the co-construction of a shared past among actors with policy will in adult education; and specifically the civil service at the UIL, academics and activists in grassroots and international non-governmental organizations that have links with the UIL and/or advocate a 'maximalist', humanistic approach to adult education (and lifelong learning) in contrast to more pragmatic, economic perspectives identified with the work of distinctive global actors in education like the OECD⁸⁵ or the EU.⁸⁶

Such a claim is grounded in the observation that ample references to these landmarks, despite the fact that they have different drives and serve diverse purposes, as I will pinpoint, are found all the way through the cluster sources examined. Here I provide just three examples.

In order to reaffirm UNESCO's global positioning as a worldwide leader in conceptual advancement toward a lifelong learning approach, which also privileges adult education within and outside school under the auspices of the UIL, several references are made to *Learning to be*⁸⁷ in a celebratory publication, *Towards an Open Learning World*.⁸⁸ *Learning to be* is visually represented

⁸³ Fauré et al., 1972.

⁸⁴ Delors et al., 1996.

⁸⁵ Rubenson, 2009, forthcoming.

⁸⁶ Borg and Mayo, 2005.

⁸⁷ Fauré et al., 1972.

⁸⁸ UIL, 2002.

within the publication⁸⁹ and on its cover through a picture of the original report by Fauré and his colleagues. Further, within the text a number of people differently connected to the UIE / UIL testify to its worldwide significance and impact.

I remember the major shifts in direction at the UIE ... These have concerned reform in the education systems of developed and developing countries, the co-ordination of research projects under the broad umbrella 'learning to be', schools as integral parts of lifelong learning and so on. [Irène Alenfeld, German, ex-UIE interpreter]⁹⁰

It should be remembered that the report of the commission chaired by E. Fauré... more or less marked the start of the debate about lifelong learning. [Joachim Knoll, German, ex-member adult education committee, UNESCO National Commission for Germany]⁹¹

These activities by the UIE [the study 'Foundation of Lifelong Learning' coordinated by the speaker, whose results have been published in English by the UIE and Pergamon Press, translated into Spanish and distributed worldwide, n/a] became an important part of UNESCO's follow-up to its 1972 international report entitled 'Learning to be' [Ravindra H. Dave, Indian, ex-UIE Director, 1979-1989]⁹²

Referencing can sometimes be ambiguous in its scope, as in the case of the editorial for the special issue of the *International Review of Education* on CONFINTEA VI follow-up, co-signed by the current UIL Deputy Director and two academics who worked on the preparation of the conference. The editorial anchors a critique of the neoliberal obsession for evidence-based policies and governing by numbers approach by referring to *Learning to be*⁹³ and *Learning: The Treasure Within*⁹⁴ as

authoritative for their adherence to common and shared values such as helping to build a substantive world with just societies

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 15.

⁹² Ibid., p. 68.

⁹³ Fauré et al., 1972.

⁹⁴ Delors et al., 1996.

that value knowledge, promote peace, celebrate diversity and defend human rights.⁹⁵

However, these claims live side by side (in the editorial) with prescriptive claims that adult education scholarships can also be used to support evidence-based policy.

A different case is that of renewing a collective consensus at the cross-roads of professional organizations and among their members, such as adult education practitioners, academics, and activists, through reproduction of entire speeches held at CONFINTEA VI, its outcome document, preparatory documents and follow-up commentaries by people with close links to the UIL in special issues of professional journals (e.g., *Adult Education and Development*, see below).

To summarize, the ideational creation of a ‘shared past’ may have different drives and serve diverse purposes such as reaffirming an institutional positioning within competing discourses, anchoring a critique to shifts in global views and perspectives, or gaining consensus to advocate for alternatives to mainstream discourses on adult education. Nonetheless, it creates a sense of ‘collective memory’ to which individuals, social groups and/or institutions can relate. A collective memory is the result of a telling and re-telling of the same stories about a shared past. Through these process the events become stereotyped (when not selectively distorted), but their significance lies not so much in what happened actually but in the events themselves. So recalling these events is by definition a process of signification that further mobilizes political will.

Brokering: Envisioning a viable future

One distinctive characteristic of UNESCO, as already mentioned, is its strong links to non-governmental and grassroots organizations. Since CONFINTEA V, non-governmental organizations have not only had their own delegations, but also actively partic-

⁹⁵ Medel-Añonuevo, Torres and Desjardins, 2011, p. 5.

ipated in the preparation and running of these conferences, for instance by proposing and organizing workshops, or advocating for a higher level of governmental participation in international conferences and regional preparatory and follow-up meetings. Some of these collective entities have been created soon after or just before the international conferences on adult education, like the ICAE (see above) or the Action Platform for Adult Education, born in 2008, during the preparation of CONFINTEA VI.

So although they were foreseen in UNESCO's constitution, these links have been strengthened over time, and are of special significance when it comes to understanding how the co-construction of a common past through landmarking connects to the process of envisioning a possible future for adult education. A future informed by UNESCO's ontology (i.e. education is what makes a human being human) requires the brokering of certain values, ideas and information. While accounts of the ideational results and/or practical implications of UNESCO's links to non-governmental and grassroots organizations can be found in the literature,⁹⁶ what is in focus here are the technologies, or methods of organization that facilitate the exchanging and diffusing of meanings.

One such technology, rather obviously, is the organization of world and international conferences on adult education under the auspices of UNESCO, together with the paramount preparatory and follow-up activities, including the preparation of background and working documents taking place before, during and after international conferences and regional meetings.⁹⁷

The point I want to make here, however, is that a different technology has developed over time through the growing structuration of relations between a limited number of people and institutions that act as 'historians' – as they have either actively contributed to the landmarking process or had at least a privileged access to its visible marks, and ownership of (or visibility

⁹⁶ Ireland and Spezia, 2012; Nesbit and Welton 2013.

⁹⁷ Milana, 2013.

within) a limited number of scientific and professional journals. This combination helps to broker values, ideas and information between a somewhat restricted circle and a broader audience. Non-governmental organizations play an important role in the structuration of these relations, as we shall see.

While different examples emerged from the data sources under consideration, I here restrict my attention to a few collective entities that act as historians *and* own (or gain visibility through) three scientific and professional journals: *International Review of Education, Adult Education and Development* and *Convergence*.

The *International Review of Education*, founded in 1931 by a German educationalist, originally published by the University of Cologne, has been published under the auspices of the UIE / UIL since 1955.⁹⁸ It is a peer-reviewed journal that (thanks to its distribution by Springer) is included in citation tracking and bibliographic databases worldwide. Originally intended to support scholarship in comparative education, it has had longstanding relations with the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES), whose triennial congresses have served as a platform for the publication of guest-edited issues. While doing so, the journal has also had an important role in fostering lifelong learning,⁹⁹ and in brokering values, ideas and information specific to the field of adult education, such as the special issue of CONFINTEA VI follow-up already mentioned. Shifts in the institutional legal status and directorship of the UIE / UIL, coupled with the appointment of a new journal's executive director, have recently led to an explicit redirection of the journal to better support the UIL's overall strategy and commitments to lifelong learning, specifically adult education, thus strengthening the journal's brokering potential in these matters.

Adult Education and Development has been published since 1973 by the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association (DVV International). Available

⁹⁸ UNESCO, 2002.

⁹⁹ Tuijnman and Boström, 2002.

in three languages, English, Spanish and French, the journal is widely distributed to libraries specializing in education worldwide, and since 2000 it has also been available for free download via the internet. The international conferences on adult education, as well as preparatory and follow-up activities, have been covered by the journal since its foundation with “A short review of the most important decisions of the Third World Conference on Adult Education, Tokyo 1973”.¹⁰⁰ Over the years an increased number of issues have been devoted, at least partly if not exclusively, to the international conferences on adult education and related events,¹⁰¹ paralleling a growing commitment of DVV International and its director to the organization of such events. These issues, for instance, make available to a broader audience background and output documents prepared before or after CONFINTEA V and CONFINTEA VI, the mid-term review conference of CONFINTEA V (Bangkok, 2003), and the II Bonn Conference on Adult Education (2009) run in collaboration between the DVV, the ICAE, the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), and the Asian South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education, with the support of the UIL and the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. Originally planned as a follow-up to CONFINTEA VI, due to a change of dates the II Bonn Conference came first; hence the work done at the conference fed into the International Civil Society Forum, convened by non-governmental organizations back-to-back with CONFINTEA VI, and into the workshops organized by DVV International at such conferences.

Convergence, an international peer-reviewed journal published since 1968, became the official journal of the ICAE, which was discontinued in 2011. Over the last eight years of its life it has been published by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), a national non-governmental organization based in the United Kingdom. The journal accepted and published manuscripts in French, Spanish, and to a major extent En-

¹⁰⁰ See *Adult Education and Development* Vol. 1/1972.

¹⁰¹ See *Adult Education and Development* Vol. 62/2004, Vol. 69/2007, Vol. 72/2009, Vol. 73/2009, Vol. 75/2010, Vol. 77/2011, Vol. 78/2012.

glish, and was (and still is) indexed and abstracted by online digital libraries such as ERIC, EBSCO, and ProQuest. *Convergence* is one of the few internationally recognized journals specializing in adult education with a focus on issues of concern for comparative and international adult education.¹⁰² Since 2001, at least one issue per year has covered articles that make explicit reference to the international conferences on adult education.¹⁰³

In sum, ‘envisioning’ a future may result in various evocations by individuals, social groups and/or institutions interacting with UNESCO. However, it is the viability issue that calls for shared action in one direction. This necessitates broadening the political ground in support of such a direction through debate, but also via agreements across groups and countries, which occurs by gathering at meetings and conferences, but also via the sharing of results among a broader audience. Yet for concrete changes to happen and guarantee the ‘right’ of education to the millions of adults entitled to such a right, governmental commitment (i.e. public spending) is crucial.

Framing: Structuring material changes

UNESCO’s area of political action, as mentioned, is often perceived as ‘low politics’¹⁰⁴ and the organization has a limited normative capacity in the strict sense of the term; its only normative or standard setting instrument that is legally binding is the convention, but besides the *Convention against the discrimination in education* (1960) or those dealing with the recognition of studies, diplomas, degrees and qualifications (1976, 1979, 1981, 1993), no convention has been signed to support adult education. And yet when we consider UNESCO’s normative action, in the sense of prescribing behavior, its political influence increases. But for such normative prescriptions to produce material changes at national level in the field of adult education, neither reference to a

¹⁰² Mulenga, Al-Harhi and Carr-Chellman, 2006.

¹⁰³ See *Convergence* Vol. 34/4 2001, Vol. 35:4/2002, Vol. 35:2-3/2002, Vol. 36:1/2003, Vol. 37:3/2004, Vol. 38:3/2005, Vol. 38:4/2005, Vol. 39: 2-3/2006, Vol. 39: 4/2006, Vol. 41:2-3/2008, Vol. 42: 2-4/2009.

¹⁰⁴ Wise and Wilkinson, 2011.

common past nor the envisioning of a viable future beyond national sovereignty is sufficient. Accordingly, the structuring of information and political intentions via specific governance mechanisms is necessary to put pressure on national governments.

One such governance mechanism is the *Recommendation on the development of adult education*.¹⁰⁵ However, this is a ‘soft’ mechanism because it is neither morally nor legally binding. As a normative action, the *Recommendation* crystallizes common beliefs, guiding norms, values and ideas about adult education around three core elements, one of which concerns its *characterization* in relation to national education systems, one its *governance* within and across nations, and one the *values and orientations* that inform both. In extreme synthesis, adult education is conceived as neither an entity in itself nor a sub-division of national education systems, but one of its components, with no theoretical boundaries and no limitation to knowledge with short-term applicability (*characterization*); adult education requires both policy and system coordination to ensure that its objectives and goals are defined in relation to the overall national development plans, taking into consideration the general objectives of education as well as social, cultural and economic policies (*governance*). And adult education is informed by values such as critical understanding and judgment, democracy, freedom, human progress, equity and social justice and living together, just to mention a few aspects. However, it also has a collective and community orientation, coupled with holistic and life orientations, among others.¹⁰⁶ And yet its relative ‘ignorance’ within national contexts is evidenced by the fact that progress on its implementation has been only loosely and sporadically monitored over a long period of time. A first monitoring report was produced in 1993, on the recommendation of CONFINTEA IV (1985), on the basis of a purposeful questionnaire compiled by approximately 1/3 of the UNESCO member states. Yet in 2007, UNESCO adopted a resolution to monitor the implementation of its ‘standard-setting instruments’, giving priority to 11 out of its 31 recommendations, including

¹⁰⁵ UNESCO, 1976.

¹⁰⁶ Milana, 2013.

the 1976 *Recommendation*, and specific monitoring procedures were established. Accordingly, a second monitoring report on the 1976 *Recommendation* was produced in 2011. Both monitoring reports shed some light on specific national instances in terms of heterogeneous visions, values and organizational principles in adult education. However, these reports are filtered by different agencies, such as the UIL personnel and external consultants that define the data collection instrument in question and present a summary based on country reports. Further, it is not always clear who provides information on national implementations in response to the requests by the UIL. But these responses are mostly representative of public bodies, which in some member states silences alternative agencies.

However, the 2011 monitoring process was made possible thanks to the development of new mechanisms that go in the direction of structuring information and intentions, and that arose in more recent times in association with CONFINTEA VI, like the *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* prepared by the UIL for the above conference, and which draws on national reports compiled by 154 member states in response to a purposeful questionnaire.¹⁰⁷ The high response rate by governments is considered by many, including the UIL's staff, to be the result of increased lobbying and pressure exerted by (among others) international non-governmental and grassroots organizations on national governments in the preparatory stage of CONFINTEA VI. It should be noted here that CONFINTEA VI was the first international conference on adult education under the auspices of UNESCO to be hosted by a Latin American country, or as one interviewee put it: in “the southern hemisphere”. Here, and especially in those countries that have returned to a democratic model, organized civil society is very active in the field of adult education, and in some cases has close relations to local and national governments, not least as intellectuals and activists are sometimes called to join the civil service, even if this is only for limited periods of time, under more leftist governments (e.g., Lula in Brazil, Kirchner in Argentina).

¹⁰⁷ UIL, 2009.

It is my claim here that the *Recommendation on the development of adult education*, the *Belém Framework for Action*, and the *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* constitute three visible marks of how governance mechanisms that set standards and institutional responsibilities as well as describing processes and practices for adult education are slowly but steadily taking form. The process through which this occurs has provoked a mobilization that brought to the forefront UNESCO's commitment to policy making (involving increased governance of its member states), the UIL (mediating between the interests of UNESCO headquarters, the member states it represents, and civil society broadly conceived), and civil society organizations (advocating adult education via international pressure on governments).

The questionnaire prepared by the UIL to gather information for the first *Global Report*¹⁰⁸ still followed the structure of the 1976 *Recommendation*; but since the *Global Report* was entered as a regular monitoring mechanism into the *Belém Framework for Action*,¹⁰⁹ its revision and an update of the 1976 *Recommendation* have been put into motion. As a result, the questionnaire prepared by the UIL for the second *Global Report*,¹¹⁰ for instance, restructured the type and quality of information to be gathered, based on the *Belém Framework for Action*,¹¹¹ while an action plan for the revision of the 1976 *Recommendation* was approved by UNESCO in 2012, under the responsibility of the UIL.

In brief, UNESCO, the UIL and civil society seem to have created a 'compact' for exerting pressure and/or advocating for governments to concretely implement UNESCO's agenda on adult education on a global scale through different governance mechanisms than those traditionally foreseen by UNESCO's constitution; thus calling for new emphasis on international benchmarking in adult education.

¹⁰⁸ UIL, 2009.

¹⁰⁹ UNESCO, 2009.

¹¹⁰ UIL, 2013.

¹¹¹ UNESCO, 2009.

Concluding remarks

This paper took its point of departure in the recognition that UNESCO is a global actor, whose intellectual and conceptual contributions have produced a specific ontology of adult education. However, scholarly emphasis on its ideational contribution and normative capacity seems to have overshadowed the processes through which UNESCO has mobilized political will across a broad set of actors when it comes to pursuing a global agenda in adult education. By looking closely at these processes, I have suggested that at least three modes of mobilization could be distinguished. Although such a distinction is delicate, as it only serves to dissect a complex phenomenon for analytical purposes, it helps to draw attention to the ways a shared past in adult education can be co-constructed (*landmarking*) and how a viable future can be envisioned (*brokering*) through interactions between UNESCO and other political actors. This led to the creation of specific standard-setting and monitoring instruments, in an attempt to produce material changes (*framing*) in adult education. This calls for further investigations that, by incorporating multi-site and multi-actor perspectives, can deepen knowledge about these processes as well as the materiality of the changes they are (or are not) able to produce.

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