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ADULT LITERACY AND BASIC EDUCATION POLICIES IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Selected findings from four country cases

ABSTRACT

Policies on adult literacy and basic education are gaining importance, especially since the results of the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) revealed that a sizeable proportion of adults have low literacy levels and reported significant differences in competence-levels between countries. This article investigates the interplay between the polity, politics, and policies of adult literacy and basic education, drawing on qualitative data from an international-comparative project which examined basic education policies across countries, with an emphasis on literacy. The article presents findings from four countries (Austria, Denmark, England, and Turkey) focusing on governance structures and applying an actor-oriented theoretical framework. The analysis provides a systematic cross-country comparison on basic education policies and recognises the importance of governance structures in designing and implementing policies.

Keywords: *adult basic education policies, governance, international comparative research, qualitative research design*

PISMENOST ODRASLIH IN TEMELJNE IZOBRAŽEVALNE POLITIKE S PRIMERJALNE PERSPEKTIVE: UGOTOVITVE IZ ŠTIRIH DRŽAV - POVZETEK

Politike opismenjevanja odraslih in temeljne izobrazbe imajo vse večji pomen, posebej odkar so rezultati mednarodne raziskave o kompetencah odraslih (PIAAC) v okviru programa OECD pokazali, da precejšen delež odraslih dosega nižje stopnje pismenosti in da obstajajo znatne razlike v stopnjah kompetenc med državami. Članek raziskuje medsebojni vpliv med različnimi oblikami politik opismenjevanja odraslih in politik temeljne izobrazbe na podlagi kvalitativnih podatkov mednarodnega primerjalnega projekta, ki je proučeval temeljne izobraževalne politike v različnih državah s poudarkom na pismenosti. Članek predstavlja podatke štirih držav (Avstrije, Danske, Anglije in Turčije), pri čemer se osredotoča na strukture upravljanja in uporablja teoretični okvir, usmerjen k akterjem. Analiza prikazuje sistematično

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primerjavo temeljnih izobraževalnih politik v omenjenih državah in kaže na pomen struktur upravljanja pri oblikovanju in izvajanju politik.

Ključne besede: *temeljna izobraževalna politika za odrasle, upravljanje, mednarodna primerjalna raziskava, kvalitativni raziskovalni načrt*

INTRODUCTION

Policies on adult literacy and basic education have become increasingly important in recent years, especially since the publication and wide dissemination of the results of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). According to PIAAC results a significant proportion of adults, even in developed economies, exhibit poor reading skills (18.8% of adults across the whole sample scored at level one in literacy or below in the first round; 18.9% in the second round) (OECD, 2013a; OECD, 2016). In addition, several national adult skills surveys provide differentiated data for literacy skills among adult populations, e.g. the German leo. – Level One Study in 2010/2011 (Grotlüschen & Riekman, 2012), the English Skills for Life Survey in 2011 (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills [BIS], 2012) and the annual French Journée Défense et Citoyenneté¹ (JDC) (Jeantheau, 2016).

The abundance of adults with low literacy skills in developed countries has led to concerted efforts by national governments alongside supranational and international organisations. The renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning (Council of the European Union, 2011) calls on Member States to focus on low-skilled/low-qualified groups and on bringing their basic skills 'one step up'. After the release of PIAAC data, the OECD makes country-specific recommendations for policy makers to tackle challenges, develop skills, and activate the supply of skills in order to achieve better outcomes for individuals and societies (OECD, 2013b; Kuczera, Field, & Windisch, 2016). Even though there are significant drivers for policy reforms at the European and international level, the policy formulation and implementation of specific policy programmes aiming at the improvement of literacy skills are under the jurisdiction of individual countries.

While there have been some overviews and reviews on policies for adult literacy and basic education (Aschemann, 2015; ELINET, 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c), there is not yet any systematic, cross-country comparison on adult basic education policies. From a comparative adult education perspective though, it is important to ask how countries develop and implement basic education policies to address the problems of low literacy adults.

The findings presented here draw from an international-comparative project on adult literacy and basic education that aimed to contrast and compare policies and governance

¹ The JDC aims, among other things, to identify youngsters (typically between 17 and 19 years old) with low literacy skills (see Jeantheau, 2016).

structures of literacy and basic education of adults in six countries: Austria, Denmark, England, France, the Netherlands, and Turkey. Because of space constraints, in this paper we only present results for four out of six countries representing different modes of governance and regulation: Austria, Denmark, England, and Turkey.

By applying an action-theoretical perspective we addressed the following questions to examine the interplay between policy, polity, and politics of adult literacy and basic education:

- How are adult literacy and basic education defined and understood on a policy level within the studied countries?
- Who are the key actors in agenda-setting and implementing policies in this field? What kind of resources do actors use to achieve specific outcomes?
- How do country-specific governance structures influence the policy and politics of literacy and basic education?

The paper is structured as follows: we first provide an outline of the theoretical framework and research design. Next, we highlight selected empirical findings from four case studies that illustrate basic education policies from policy content to policy implementation. Emphasis is placed on the identification of influential actors and actor-constellations, their resources, responsibilities, and interactions with regard to the respective governance structures. We conclude with some reflections on comparative research on adult literacy and basic education policies, and suggestions for further research.

ADULT LITERACY AND BASIC EDUCATION POLICIES: MULTIPLE ACTORS EMBEDDED IN VARIOUS INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS

To answer the questions raised in the introduction, we draw on the approaches of educational governance and actor-centred institutionalism. The concept of educational governance seems to be an adequate theoretical approach for addressing questions concerning the coordination and management of the mutual interdependencies of actors in the education system (Ioannidou, 2007; Abs, Brüsemeister, Schemmann, & Wissinger, 2015; Schrader, Schmid, Amos, & Thiel, 2015). The term ‘educational governance’ recognises the dynamics that arise from the emergence of policy actors at various levels (local, regional, national, transnational) and emphasises the variety of patterns among interactions and collective actions (i.e. networks, coalitions, majority rule, negotiations) (Benz & Dose, 2010). In this framework, action is embedded in institutionalised rule systems (hierarchy, market, majority rule structures, negotiations) which rarely appear in pure forms, but in varying combinations. Actors in this multilayer system exist interdependently: decision making requires a high-degree of coordination across the board.

The concept of governance is often connected with action theories, notably with actor-centred institutionalism (Scharpf, 1997, 2006). The main analytical categories of the educational governance approach and actor-centred institutionalism are quite similar (Scharpf, 2006, p. 73; Kussau & Brüsemeister, 2007, p. 26; Ioannidou, 2010, p. 273). In

the framework of actor-centred institutionalism, policy processes are driven by “the interaction of individual and corporate actors endowed with certain capabilities and specific cognitive and normative orientations, within a given institutional setting and within a given external situation” (Scharpf, 1997, p. 37).

Policies in literacy and basic education can thus be explained with reference to actor-centred institutionalism as being the outcome of interactions among intentional actors – individual, collective, or corporate actors. These interactions are structured and their outcomes are shaped by the characteristics of the institutional settings in which they occur. According to this theorem, actors are characterised by their specific orientations (perceptions and preferences) and by their specific capabilities, i.e. their material and immaterial resources such as money, privileged access to information, competencies and jurisdictions, participation and veto rights (Scharpf, 1997, pp. 43–44). The modes of interaction within this framework are classified under hierarchical direction, unilateral action, negotiated agreement, and majority vote (*ibid.*, pp. 46–47).

Policy making, by definition, involves intentional action by the actors who are most interested in achieving specific outcomes. Within the field of adult literacy and basic education, we assume a range of both state (ministries and regional authorities) and non-state actors (trade unions, educational institutions, professional associations, etc.) at different levels involved in policy-making by determining the content, securing financing, and implementing policies. Both state and non-state actors act purposefully to achieve specific goals. Their strategic action ability depends, firstly, on their capabilities in terms of material and immaterial resources, secondly, on the convergence or divergence of their perceptions and preferences, and thirdly, upon the institutional settings within which they act. These enable or hamper negotiations, unilateral actions or even hierarchical decisions.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This paper analyses international comparative data on adult literacy and basic education collected in the context of the ‘EU-Alpha’ research project, conducted by the German Institute for Adult Education – Leibniz Centre for Lifelong Learning and funded by the Federal Ministry for Education and Research. Our analysis aims to contrast and compare policies and governance structures of literacy and basic education of adults in six countries (Austria, Denmark, England, France, the Netherlands, and Turkey). The findings presented here draw on qualitative data from expert interviews and policy documents. Expert interviews were conducted with key actors in the field of adult literacy and basic education policy. We focus on institutional settings and on the key stakeholders’ understanding of the content and the boundaries of adult literacy and basic education. Because of space constraints, in this paper we only present results for four out of six countries: Austria, Denmark, England, and Turkey.

Following Meuser and Nagel (2009, pp. 24–25) experts are defined as having a special knowledge in a certain area of interest acquired through their activity or specific function and not necessarily through their training or profession. The interviews included state (mostly policy administration at ministerial level) and non-state actors, notably national associations for adult and basic education, trade unions and educational researchers. We conducted 24 non-standardised and semi-structured interviews between 2014 and 2015 in the four countries with an average interview duration of 66 minutes. The content was analysed with the software programme MAXQDA (Kuckartz, 2010) according to a systematic, rule guided qualitative content analysis after Mayring (2015). The data were structured mainly along deductive categories derived from theory which were supplemented by inductive categories deviated from the data themselves. To aid the contextualisation and validation of the expert views, education policy documents (e.g. programmatic texts, guidelines, recommendations, reports, and legal acts) were reviewed and analysed alongside the qualitative content analysis.

The selection of the country cases follows the typology developed by Green, Wolf, and Leney (1999, pp. 79–106) which identifies four primary models of educational regulation and governance to which countries can be assigned: centralised systems, regional systems, systems with local control, and systems with institutional control in a quasi-market. Although the typology mainly refers to modes of regulation of formal education and vocational training, there is a similar spectrum of regulation in adult education in the selected countries – from centralised regulation to market control. Literacy and basic education provision is embedded in various sectors of the educational system: in general and vocational education for young people as well as in further education for adults. The recourse to general modes of regulation in education and training is also due to the fact that there is a lack of typologies and comparative information on adult education system characteristics (e.g. governance and regulation, funding mechanisms, etc.).

COMPARING THE POLICY, POLITY, AND POLITICS OF LITERACY AND BASIC EDUCATION: SELECTED EMPIRICAL FINDINGS FROM FOUR COUNTRY CASES

In this section we present selected empirical findings covering four countries – Austria, Denmark, England, and Turkey – to allow contrast analysis according to the research questions. All findings listed below originate from the analysis of expert interviews (unless otherwise stated).

For systematic reasons we distinguish in the following between the processes (politics), the institutional order (polity), and the content (policy) (Schmidt, 2004, pp. 535–538), although politics, policy, and polity are in the English speaking world an undividable three-point term. This differentiation allows focusing each time on one dimension of the complex policy term, even if it is self-evident that policy, polity, and politics cannot be strictly delineated since they are interdependent.

Policies on literacy and basic education

Looking at the policy dimension, the focus was on how literacy and basic education are defined and understood at the policy level in Austria, Denmark, England, and Turkey. The particular interest was on the understanding of basic and literacy education policy *by state* actors, and whether these policies are stand-alone topics on the (educational) political agenda.

Internationally, two main lines of argumentation can be identified in the political rhetoric on the necessity of literacy and basic education: basic education as part of the human right to education and basic education as a precondition for labour market participation. The first derives from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Declaration of Human Rights, the 26th Article of which acknowledges the Right to Education as a fundamental human right (UN, 1948). Literacy is considered part of the right to education and a public good, of which the state is the duty bearer (UNESCO, 2015, p. 47). The second line of argumentation derives from the OECD² and its conceptual underpinnings in human capital theory (Becker, 1993). Accordingly, the essential role of basic education (and education in general) is to generate high levels of skills needed for economic competitiveness and sustainable growth in a globalised economy (OECD, 2013c). Within this framework, basic skills have been defined in terms of their potential contribution to economic activity and individual employability, and also in terms of enabling participation in civic life.

In the country-specific notions of literacy and basic education it is possible to identify a bias towards either the OECD or the UNESCO framing of literacy³. In addition, country-specific notions of literacy and basic education are suffused with the prevalent education narrative, national traditions, and culture-specific patterns of meaning. They seem to be enforced by geopolitical developments and specific institutional trajectories. The notion of path-dependence in comparative analyses is linked to the idea that 'history matters.' Questions of timing and the initial conditions seem to be of a great importance since they have a strong impact on subsequent development paths (Pierson, 2000).

In *Turkey*, for example, the state changing from the Persian-Arabic alphabet to the Latin alphabet at the beginning of the 20th century, when the entire population had to be retrained for this new alphabet, led to identifying literacy education as a sole state responsibility. Nowadays the Ministry of Education defines literacy as the ability "[to] read what you see and to write what you think" (citation from the conducted interview with a representative from the Turkish Ministry of Education). Literacy education for adults includes Turkish, math, and life-skills, which is equivalent to that at Turkish primary schools. The majority of literacy course completers attend other educational offers too, such as work-related courses

2 The European Union discourse on literacy and adult basic education oscillates between empowerment (UNESCO) and employability (OECD).

3 For a systematic review on the different concepts and terms of adult literacy and basic education see http://www.unesco.org/education/GMR2006/full/chapt6_eng.pdf.

to improve opportunities for integration into the labour market. Education policy and literacy campaigns still have very strong normative orientations and are considered by the Turkish state as both a way to develop a progressive society and to educate citizens towards accepting the “values and principles of the Turkish state” (Karakışoğlu, 2010, p. 770).

Looking at the *Austrian* case it can be stated that there is a broader understanding of basic education comprising learning skills (autonomous learning, learning to learn), the German language (speaking, reading, and writing), a basic competence in another language (speaking, reading, and writing), numeracy, and the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Frauen [Federal Ministry of Education and Women], 2017). There is a clear preference for the term basic education over the term (il)literacy as the former does not have so many negative connotations. According to ministry representatives, the concept of basic education exceeds the given definition and includes an emancipatory aspect in terms of one’s capacity to act as a citizen. There is a distinction between basic education and the completion of school education for adults, even though the first can be a precondition of the second.

In *Denmark* basic education is not a prevalent concept. The interviewed experts usually use the term adult education, which is divided into general, vocational, and non-formal adult education, and tied to different programmes and laws. Basic education can be part of educational offers in all three fields of adult education. Closest to the idea of basic education is the programme of preparatory adult education (Forberedende Voksenundervisning (FVU)), which was initiated by the government in 2000 and can be assigned to the field of general adult education. Preparatory adult education includes educational offers in reading, writing, and math; it can be implemented in a variety of settings (also in the workplace) (<https://www.retsinformation.dk>). State actors emphasise the historical significance of adult education in Denmark, based on an emancipatory understanding of education. This concept was influenced by the Danish scholar Nikolai Grundtvig (1783–1872), who stressed the importance education has for participation in civic society.

In *England* basic skills attainment, especially literacy and numeracy, are recognised by state actors as a predominant factor for integration into the labour market. The government mainly refers to basic skills in a vocational context whilst emphasising the target audience of young adults and the completion of formal education qualifications. Basic education includes ‘Functional Skills’ (English, numeracy, ICT), which represent the practical application of basic skills in everyday life. As part of ‘Functional Skills’, people can achieve qualifications which are rated in equivalence to ‘entry level’ and to ‘levels 1–2’ of the National Qualification Framework (NQF). The close connection between policies on basic education, formal (school) education, and the labour market can be seen in the political programme of the past five years (2010–2015)⁴. Government-funded basic edu-

4 For instance, the decision to improve the training system by increasing the age at which young people are no longer required to attend training to 18 (Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills) or the reform programme Getting the Job Done: The Government’s Reform Plan for Vocational Qualifications, which aims to reform English and math qualifications.

cation courses are almost exclusively based in a workplace-related context. That means that the content of basic education courses is related to work situations or knowledge and skills for specific jobs (in order to prepare a person for these jobs).

Summing up, it can be noted that the definition of basic education deployed in the country cases comprise literacy but also basic skills such as numeracy and ICT. With regard to the function of basic education, state actors in England primarily emphasise benefits to the labour market, whereas in Austria, Turkey, and Denmark they also underline political education and civic participation as being key aspects of basic education. Turkish emphasis lays on national values while Austria and Denmark highlight emancipation and empowerment. In England the basic education policy agenda is clearly linked with policies concerning vocational training and the labour market, whereas in Austria and Turkey basic education policies are less dependent on labour market policies. Denmark has a flexible understanding of basic education, linking it to various learning environments and purposes. In all cases, the country-specific notion of basic education policy is shaped not only by current debates deriving from the growing influence of international and supra-national organisations but has roots in national traditions and historical narratives as the examples of Denmark and Turkey reveal.

Key actors and responsibilities (polity)

For the polity-dimension, that is the political institutional order and responsibilities, we analysed governance structures focusing on key actors in the field, their competencies and capabilities. The research question addressed was: Who are the key actors (state and non-state) involved in policy-making, especially in determining the content, securing financing and implementing basic education and literacy policy?

In all countries, state actors are mainly responsible for determining the *content* of basic education policies; non-state actors can also be found in a subordinate role though. In some cases there are different state-levels responsible depending on the type of governance in the education system (compare Table 1).

Table 1: Own classification of the selected countries concerning their governance structures in adult basic and literacy education into the typology of Green et al. (1999)

Models of education regulation and governance (Green et al., 1999)			
<i>Centralised systems with some elements of devolution and choice</i>	<i>Regional systems with some minor devolution and choice</i>	<i>Local controlling with national 'steering'</i>	<i>Institutional autonomy in quasi market systems</i>
Turkey		Denmark	England
Austria			

In *Turkey*, all relevant decisions concerning the content of basic education policy are made by the Ministry of National Education (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı (MEB)). The Ministry is

the supreme governing and controlling body of the national education programme. It is responsible for all (further) training measures and teaching content (e.g. curriculum development; definition of criteria for formal and non-formal education achievements, with the exception of universities).

In *Austria*, both state and non-state actors are responsible for defining the content of basic education and literacy policy but in different functions. An expert group, which consists of state and non-state actors, decides the central content requirements for a cooperation-initiative between the federal state government and the federal states, the “Initiative Erwachsenenbildung” [Initiative Adult Education]. This expert group is a key actor within the Austrian basic education and literacy policy. Representatives of the federal government (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Frauen), the federal states (respective provincial government offices) and the Arbeitsmarktservice [Job Center Association] as well as of non-state actors such as the Konferenz der Erwachsenenbildung Österreichs [Conference of Austrian Adult Education] (which is an umbrella group of the main non-profit providers of adult education), social partners and individual scientists are members of this expert group. Although the decision-making competence lies with the federal and the federal states’ governments, non-state actors play an important role in policy development, in particular the trade unions and the umbrella group of training providers. The current structure of the cooperation-initiative “Initiative Erwachsenenbildung” has a central supervisory body which is able to make important decisions with a three-quarters majority vote. Four seats in this supervisory body are for the federal government and nine are for the federal states (all seats with voting rights). Representatives of the social partners only have an advisory function, without voting rights.

Several state actors are responsible for defining the content of basic education and literacy policy in *Denmark*, since basic and literacy education can be part of the threefold, general, vocational and non-formal adult education. The content of preparatory adult education which is mainly associated with basic and literacy education is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education (Undervisningsministeriet). Nevertheless, state actors indicate in the interviews that non-state actors, in particular social partners, do have influence through their participation in different boards of adult education in an advisory function (tripartite negotiations). Furthermore, preparatory adult education is a comprehensive and flexible programme, giving the providers at a regional and local level plenty of leeway for the exact content specification of literacy and basic education concerning offers, target groups, and educational settings.

In *England*, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) is responsible for the determination of basic education and literacy policy. However, training providers that implement the basic education policy get a certain scope for content decisions within a given framework (such as the qualification levels of teachers).

The *financing* of basic education lies, in all country cases, with state actors. In *Turkey* the responsibility lies solely in the hands of the central Ministry of Education. In *Austria* both

federal states and the federal state government (Ministry of Education and Women) are responsible for the financing of basic education and literacy. Much of the promotion of basic education for adults in Austria takes place through the “Initiative Erwachsenenbildung”. This initiative is based on a joint federal government and federal-states agreement (pursuant to Art. 15a B-VG), deciding a joint financing (against the federal principle of separate competencies and financing of federal government and federal states). In *Denmark* basic education financing, depending on the area of adult education, is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education or the local communities. Preparatory adult education is financed and administered by the Ministry of Education. The money is distributed to 30 regional government-funded, self-governing adult education centres (Voksenuddannelsescenter (VUCs)), which are subordinate to the Ministry of Education and which are also providers of adult education. The VUCs are further entitled (since 2007) in licensing of other providers to offer adult education and receive state funding. his role, being a provider and at the same time having a conditional mandate for licensing other adult education providers, might lead to conflicts between VUCs and other providers. In *England* the funding for basic education and literacy is the responsibility of BIS. The executive authority of BIS for the administration of budget in the field of education (excluding higher education) is the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), which forwards funds to training providers directly.

Concerning the *implementation* of literacy and basic education policies different (state, non-state) educational institutions or service providers are responsible. In *Turkey*, the implementation is primarily a governmental responsibility and determined by hierarchical decisions. Institutions of adult and continuing education, which are under the control of the Directorate of Lifelong Learning of the Turkish Ministry of Education, are responsible for the implementation of adult literacy courses. *Austria* allows only non-profit providers to apply for funding toward basic education and literacy courses. Hence, the implementation is characterised by non-state and non-profit providers. Education providers are bound to the quality specifications of the “Initiative Erwachsenenbildung” for the implementation of their offers. A similar situation can be found in Denmark, even though the implementation of preparatory adult education is under the jurisdiction of the state-run VUC and a few other non-state and non-profit providers. Quality standards for education providers are specified in the legal text of the preparatory adult education law and in a manual for providers. In *England* the implementation of literacy and basic education policies is the responsibility of non-state providers from the non-profit and profit sectors that compete for funding. Quality standards for providers and their subsidised offers are inspected by the government-funded educational inspection authority Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted).

Based on the above, it is evident that in the field of literacy and basic education a variety of both state (ministries and regional authorities) and non-state actors (e.g. trade unions, educational providers, professional associations, municipalities, and experts) are involved in policy-making. They determine the content, secure financing and implement

policies in this field. In all the considered countries it is the state actors (in the case of Austria state actors at different levels) who are mainly responsible for determining the *content* of basic education policies. This is not surprising as the securing of the provision of basal qualifications for all citizens is a core activity of a state. Furthermore, Austria (due to its corporatist tradition with influential major interest groups) and Denmark (due to its decentralised system and tripartite negotiations) also involve non-state actors. Unsurprisingly, a similar pattern can be seen in the *financing*: state actors are responsible for financing in all the considered countries. This is seen in Turkey and England at the central ministry level; in Austria in both the central and federal states; and in Denmark at the state and regional/local level. The *implementation* varies between countries: in Turkey implementation is performed by state-actors, in Denmark by state and non-state actors, whereas in Austria and England implementation is the responsibility of non-state actors only. In Austria and Denmark those actors are non-profit oriented; in England some are profit and some are non-profit oriented.

With regard to governance structures in the area of basic education and literacy policy, the findings indicate that Austria cannot fully be assigned to the centralised model as proposed by Green, Wolf, and Leney (1999), since both the federal state government and the federal states are involved in governance (compare Table 1). Turkey can clearly be assigned to the centralised governance model, whereas Denmark to the local system with decentralised control structures, having the financing and quality standards from the state but leeway concerning the distribution of funding and the design of the content on the regional/local level. Finally, England can be clearly assigned to the model of quasi-market systems with limited state influence in line with the typology of Green, Wolf, and Leney.

The politics of literacy and basic education

As illustrated before, different actors (state and non-state) at different levels are involved in the formulation and implementation of policy programmes on adult literacy and basic education. These actors work within an institutional framework which allows or restricts their activities, corresponding to the governance structures of each country. According to Scharpf (1997), institutional settings define both the capabilities of actors and the forms of interaction. Capabilities could be defined as “all action resources that allow an actor to influence an outcome in certain respects and to a certain degree” (Scharpf, 1997, p. 43) while the forms of interaction between actors are “unilateral action”, “negotiated agreement”, “majority vote”, and “hierarchical decision” (ibid., 47).

The decisive capabilities of state actors are primarily regulative power in the form of legislation and decision-making competencies (compare Table 2). In addition, they have material resources in the form of budgets or structural frameworks, enabling them to finance and implement policies. Non-state actors are in particular equipped with intangible resources, e.g. expertise, privileged access to information or access to the field. Not all actors have equal access to the same resources, which leads to dependencies and interdependencies between them.

Table 2: Actors and their primary resources in the selected countries

Country	State Actor	Primary resources	Non-state actors	Primary resources
Austria	Federal state government (Ministry for Education and Women) and federal states (and the respective offices of the state governments)	Decision-making power, money	Social partners	Expertise and privileged access to information in the field, state-allocated, advisory function/ rights
Denmark	Ministry of Education/VUCs	Decision-making power, money/ conditional mandate for licensing other adult education providers (to receive state funding and provide offers)	Non-state, non-profit education providers and scientists	Expertise and privileged access to information in the field, advisory function for the state in different and varying advisory boards
England	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills	Decision-making power, money	NIACE	Expertise and privileged access to information in the field
Turkey	Ministry of Education	Decision-making power, money	No relevant non-state actors	-

Furthermore, according to Scharpf (1997) the institutional setting influences the mode of interaction between actors. Applying Scharpf's interaction forms to our findings, Turkey clearly demonstrates a hierarchical direction by the state with no relevant actors besides the state. In England there were – at the time of the interviews – some relevant non-state actors, such as the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE⁵) influencing basic education and literacy policy or its implementation. NIACE was able to influence policy through privileged access to information and expertise, e.g. when preparing reports and educational concepts. However, these expertise/reports were primarily used as a source of information by the state actors⁶, and therefore interaction takes place

5 NIACE existed at the time of the expert interviews but merged with the 'Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion' in 2015 to form the 'Learning and Work Institute', a quasi-state organisation with a more work-oriented focus.

6 Experts were, for example, involved in the report "Adult Literacy and Numeracy". This report makes recommendations on how adults can improve their literacy and math skills. Furthermore, the report suggests (as one of many suggestions) a national campaign to improve adult basic education (House of Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, 2014, p. 46) and the further public-funding of basic education efforts by the trade unions. Contrary to the recommendations of non-state actors, a national campaign is currently being politically rebuffed. Additionally, the state funding of basic education by trade unions has been greatly reduced over the past three years.

rather in the form of a unilateral action by the state. A similar situation can be found in Denmark, where non-state actors like adult education organisations and researchers are contacted by state-actors to receive policy advice. In Austria non-state actors such as the social partners also have expert knowledge and privileged access to information and to the field. Yet their influence formally exceeds the one of non-state actors in England and Denmark. In Austria non-state actors (e.g. the association of non-profit providers *Konferenz der Erwachsenenbildung Österreichs (KEBÖ)*, the federal states network *Ländernetzwerk Weiterbildung*, social partners, and scientists) were involved in the development of the “Initiative *Erwachsenenbildung*”. The social partners have a permanent (non-voting) right to advisory participation in the supervisory group of this political initiative. The contributions of non-state actors are considered to be very important for governmental decision-making, even though they are legally non-binding. Hence, the mode of interaction in Austria can be allocated between unilateral action by the state actors and negotiated agreement between state and non-state actors. The representatives of the federal state government and of the federal states discuss their decisions in the mode of negotiation. More precisely, decisions in the supervisory body of the current initiative are passed on a majority vote of three-quarters.

In summary and in conjunction with the third research question, it can be stated that the respective governance model and the institutional context of the actors do shape the mode of interaction (Scharpf, 1997, 2006). Centralised governance systems (Turkey) favour decisions that are made hierarchically. Regional systems with several state actors (Austria) tend to have negotiated agreements or majority decisions. The local control system (Denmark) favours unilateral decisions of (state) actors on a local level and the quasi-market system (England) unilateral decisions on the ministerial level. Non-state actors in Austria, Denmark, and England can to a certain extent influence policy-making and implementation with resources like expertise, privileged access to the field and participation rights in institutionalised advisory functions (only in Austria). In contrast, no influential non-state actors can be found in Turkey, which is characterised by hierarchical decision making.

CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK: COMPARING POLICIES ON LITERACY AND BASIC EDUCATION

This paper described the interplay between the policy, polity, and politics of literacy and basic education in four countries: Austria, Denmark, England, and Turkey. Drawing on findings from a research project, the paper provides a systematic cross-country comparison by answering questions on how country-specific governance structures influence the policy and politics of adult literacy and basic education by applying an actor-oriented framework.

The analysis shows that cross country differences can be identified at three levels. First, at *policy* level, it is evident that the country specific notion of basic education is rooted in

national traditions and specific institutional trajectories. Second, at *polity* level, it seems that the respective governance model has a significant influence both on the variety of actors involved as well as on their interaction forms and decision making power. Reasonably, there are more actors involved in policy formulation as well as in policy implementation in decentralised systems rather than in centralised ones. Finally, at the level of *politics*, it can be stated that centralised governance systems (Turkey) favour decisions that are made hierarchically. Regional systems with several state actors (Austria) tend to have negotiated agreements or majority decisions. In this case decision-making requires a high level of coordination between various actors.

The findings can contribute to an informed and broader debate on adult skills policies in various countries. Further, they can generate research questions on how conditions at macro level (political, socioeconomic, and institutional factors) can affect the provision of basic adult education and subsequently participation patterns and skills outcomes. This could be a first step to evaluate the effects of adult basic education policies. Given that the lack of basic education diminishes education and life chances, basic education can be defined as a public good and part of welfare state policy. Consequently, it would be challenging to extend the current research and our understanding of literacy and basic education policies and to define them as a part of modern welfare policy (Knauber & Ioannidou, 2017). These insights as well as evidence from research on skills production regimes and inequality issues (Allmendinger & Leibfried, 2003) provide a solid ground for further research on the supply and demand side of adult literacy and basic education as well as on the interplay between institutional structures and participation patterns.

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