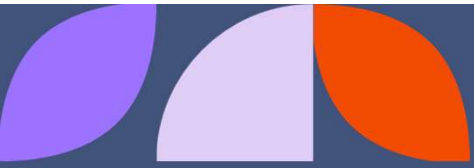




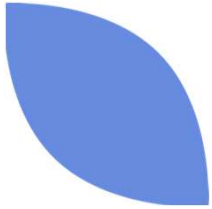
The democratic impact of adult education policies: exploring the added value *policy feedback effects on mass publics*

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PSAE/ESREA
13-15 May 2026- Hamburg





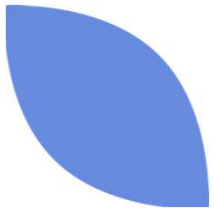
What do we want to know (RQ) and why (relevance): *The democratic relevance of AE policies*



The democratic relevance of adult education policies



- ✓ **Adult education policies** (particularly in formal and non-formal contexts) **have attracted political and policy attention as :**
 - **complex bundle of policies embedded into policy domains, namely education, welfare and labour market policies** (Desjardins and Kalenda, 2025; Milana et al, 2020)
 - **meant to contribute to the overall economic competitiveness** (e.g. European Commission, Union of Skills, 2025)
 - **Increasingly competing with ALMPs** (Bonoli et al 2025)
 - **Part of a collective and individual lifelong learning strategy** (non-formal learning lion's share of participation)

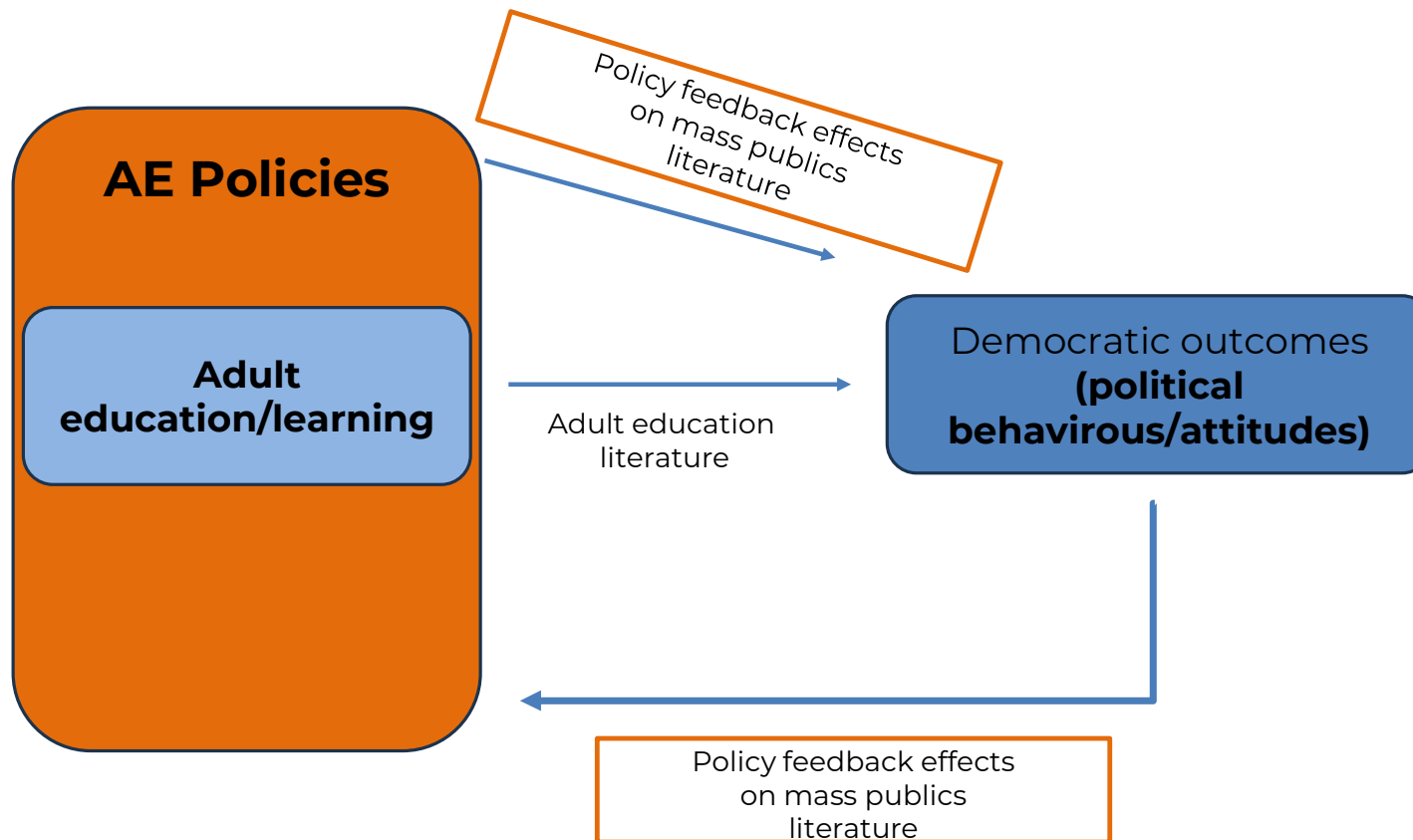


The democratic relevance of adult education policies

Some overarching research questions:

- 1. Do adults learners, and individuals in general, support AE policies? And Why?**
- 2. Do the design of adult education policies affect individual political attitudes?**
- 3. Can the way in which AE policies are implemented affect adult learners' political behaviour?**

The democratic relevance of adult education policies





What do we know (literature review):

*Literature on adult
education and policy
feedback effects on political
attitudes and behaviours*



Lit. on (adult) education and political attitudes and behaviours

Education (in general, direct and indirect effects)

- **Higher level is associated with higher participation in politics** (yet need to account for institutional diversity)
- **Developing skills relevant for understanding and participating in politics** (Freire, Giroux)
- **Acquiring skills and knowledge can affect the political interest and efficiency**
- **Status gained increase political participation**

Adult education

- **Higher participation in civic, political and cultural activities** (Ruhose et al 2019)
- **Increased engagement in politics** (Busse et al 2019)
- **Adult education as a deliberative practice can affect civic engagement** (Muñoz and Wrigley, 2012)
- **(Civic) adult education has an impact on civic disposition and political conversations, socio-cognitivist approach** (Gastil 2004)

Do not tell us whether and why people support AE policies and what features of the policy affect political participation



Lit. on policy feedback effects on mass publics

To our best knowledge: **No research linking adult education *policies* to political attitudes and participation** (**Mettler 2002 exception**)

“policy not as an effect, but as a cause” (Béland et al 2022:1)

New policies create new politics (Schattschneider, 1935 as cited in 1993:595)

- ✓ **Historical neo-institutionalist context looking at how policies shape state capacity, interest groups, policies and mass politics over time** (Pierson, 1993)
- ✓ **How public policies affects political participation and attitudes (of target individuals and beyond) and how these feedback through self-reinforcing or self-undermining effects on the policy** (e.g. in terms of support, policy preferences, negative policy opinion) **unmaking demand for policy** (Dupuy and Bussi, 2019)



Lit. on policy feedback effects on mass publics

Political outcomes analysed in the literature

- ✓ **Political participation, broadly defined** (turnout, party membership, contact to politician, political efficacy and civic participation and citizens mobilisation among others, etc.) (Campbell, 2011).
- ✓ **Political attitudes and opinions, that can be policy-specific or more general attitudes** (such spending preference, government responsibility attribution, support to welfare state policies, etc.) (Larson 2019)

Two main mechanisms at work connecting policies and political outcomes

- ✓ **Resources effects** – immaterial and material resources that modify self – interest and the conditions for exercising political participation (time, skills, knowledge)
- ✓ **Interpretative effects** – modify cognitive schemes of individuals by sending direct or indirect messages, like stigmatisation, deservingness, socialising, judgemental messages



Lit. on policy feedback effects on mass publics

(Selected) Features of policy design affecting policy outcomes (welfare policies)

- ✓ **Targeting– eligibility, image and burden** (Schneider and Igram 1993)
- ✓ **Universal vs means-tested and their generosity** (Bruch et al, 2010; Watson, 2015; Campbell, 2012) → **sense of entitlement and stigma affecting political engagement**
- ✓ **Conditionality of benefits** (Watson, 2015)
- ✓ **Providing skills, knowledge and learning opportunities** (Mettler, 2002) → **foster civic engagement to 'pay back' society**

(Selected) Features of implementation of policy design affecting policy outcomes

- ✓ **Paternalist and punitive approach to policy** (Bruch et al 2010) → **can depress civic engagement**
- ✓ **Traceability of the policy** (Hamel, 2025) → **can shape government support**
- ✓ **Policy saliency** (Soss and Schram, 2007) → **making the incumbent accountable / shape government support**
- ✓ **Proximity of the policy** (Soss and Schram, 2007)

How do these mechanisms apply to AE policies and how do they affects democratic outcome?



What can we learn (added value): *Bringing together the two literature streams – the case of Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs)*



Bringing the two streams of knowledge together: ALMPs with training component

ALMPs as a good testing ground

✓ Policy design features :

- ✓ **Adult education component / training (non –formal and formal)** (Boeren and Whittaker 2018)
- ✓ **Can have strong condinationality (type of learning and criteria of access)**
- ✓ **Highly relevant for the target group as a stepping stone to increased employability**
- ✓ **Interaction with the authority might be punitive**



Bringing the two streams of knowledge together: ALMPs with training component



Active labour
market policy
component
Policy design
(policy feedback
literature)

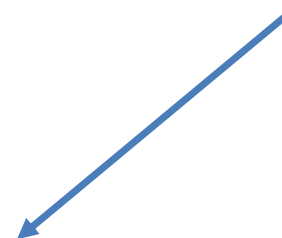
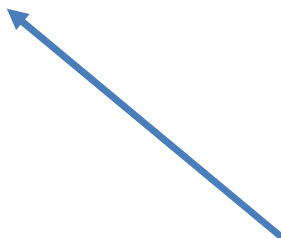
Ressources and interpretative
effects



Education component as a
mediating effect
(socio-cognitive literature +
social-psychology)

Democratic outcomes

1. Policy attitudes towards ALMPs with a training component
2. Political behaviour like voter turnout or engagement in civic engagement





Bringing the two streams of knowledge together: ALMPs with training component

Active labour market policy component

Policy design

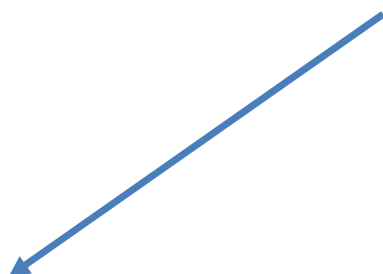
- ✓ Definition of the target group (stigmatising)
- ✓ Availability and generosity of allowance
- ✓ Traceability of the training provider and policy implementer
- ✓ Frequency, intensity and type of contact with front-line agents
- ✓ Type of training (vocational, general skills, basic skills)
- ✓ Conditionality (compulsory or not)



Democratic outcomes

Policy attitudes towards ALMPs with a training component or trust on incumbent
Political behaviour like voter turnout or engagement in civic engagement

**Ressources and
interpretative
effects**



Education component as a mediating effect

Education-based effect

- ✓ Critically reflect on the meaning of their experience (Brookfeld, 1995)
- ✓ Political literacy
- ✓ Type of skills and disposition to use them

Socio-cognitive effects linked to formal and non-formal education (Gastil, 2004)

- ✓ Self-efficacy (conditions)
- ✓ Socialisation to social norms

Psychological effects

- ✓ Increased well-being
- ✓ Risk perception (of finding a job) (Zhmag et al 2023)
- ✓ Expectancy –value (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000;)
- ✓ Reasoned –behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen)
- ✓ Motivation (Vertongen et al 2009)



Added value, challenges and future research avenues



Added value:

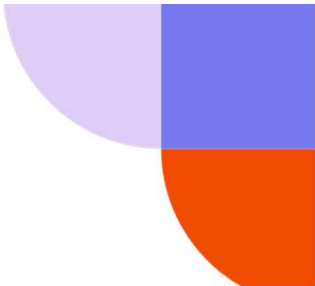
- ✓ **Acknowledging the role of adult education** as a relevant 'democratic outcome-shaper- policy
- ✓ Digging deeper on **micro-psychological effects** and unpack what happens at the individual level
- ✓ Bringing the **public policy and political sociology dimension** back into AE policy studies

Future avenues:

- ✓ **Expanding to aggregate data to analyse support for AE policies**
- ✓ **Original data collection** for fine-grained survey data
- ✓ Need for **qualitative analyses of policy feedback effects** (Bussi et al 2022)
- ✓ Interesting for **other AE policies**, namely policy targeting basic skills and literacy (for instance for migrants)

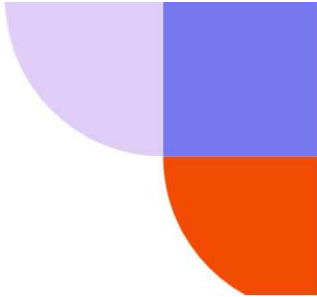
Challenges:

- ✓ How to ensure that **causality** is measured ? (SoRelle and Michener, 2022)



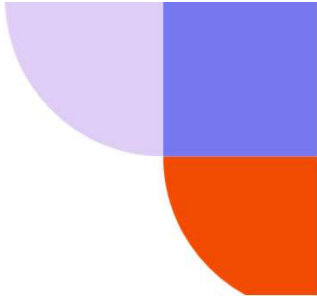
Thank you

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