LEARNING TO RETIRE: MIGRANTS AGEING IN AN HOSTING COUNTRY

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Introduction

In this paper we will deal with the results of an evaluative research promoted by ECAP Switzerland Foundation (www.ecap.ch), in cooperation with Fdep - *Fondation pour le Developpement de l'Education Permanente – Geneve, (*www.fdep.ch), in the framework of their common participation to the Socrates Project MAPA (*Motiver les Adults a l'Apprentissage*).
The project aimed at analysing learning processes occurring in "non formal" training environments, in order to enhance the role of animators and social operators working in these contexts, detecting their awareness to act as facilitators of "intentional" learning processes laying behind the different "main" activities and goals of the projects they are dealing with. Normally the issues are related to reinsertion of disadvantaged people in the job market, integration of immigrants in the hosting country, gender equal opportunities faced to the access to job market or continuous vocational training. All these aims generally imply the development of empowerment processes, which have to be strictly linked with a good and aware management of learning.

Our research considered one of these projects, promoted in several editions and different regions of German and French speaking Switzerland cantons (Bern, Neuchatel, Bienne, Winterthur) between 2003 and 2006: the project "*Menschen und Geschichten*" (People and Stories). The project addressed retired migrant workers of the first generation, who decide to maintain their residence in the hosting country, breaking in this way the "routine" preparing them to return in the country of origin after the retirement. Actual goal of the project was to help this people reflecting on their biographies, evocating then stories and fairy tales of their youth, or inventing new ones, in order to formalise them in short written tales, to be presented to groups and classrooms of young Swiss and alien pupils. The project in this sense aimed at creating an extraordinary opportunity of intergenerational and intercultural exchange, enhancing social integration chances of the migrant workers in their transition to the "third age" in the hosting country (a choice made by more and more retired migrants during the last years). The project goals implied of course complex learning processes, involving both retired people (learn to formalise their biographies, to write them in a local language using ICT supports, to speak in front of the classroom, and so on) and young pupils (learn to recognise intercultural frames, to reflect on their origins, to manage intergenerational relations, and so on).

The paper will analyse these learning processes focusing on the balance between intentional and informal learning strategies, developed by the people and supported by the trainers.
With reference to the issues the Conference focuses on, our contribution will deal mainly with topics such as:
  ➢ lifelong learning in transition to the third age
  ➢ inter-cultural transitions in learning
  ➢ transitions between non formal and formal contents
The report will focus on some processes, considering:
  ➢ how adult and old learners could be motivated to accept unusual learning challenges
  ➢ the role of biographical approaches, and reflection, in enabling learning processes
  ➢ the role of verbalisation and formalisation in enhancing learning

Methodological approach

Our empirical survey has been based on the analysis of the documents produced by the project (plans, final and evaluation reports), realising in addition interviews with trainers and facilitators and three focus groups, moderated by the author, each of them involving 4/5 participants, belonging to 3 different editions of the project (Bern, Neuchatel, Winterthur).

Three main theoretical and scientific streams are at the basis of our approach:

- first of all we have taken into account studies concerning *immigration and ageing in the hosting countries*, having realised –by the way – how this issue has to be considered quite totally new in the social and economic research on migrations;
- then we have considered the debate, particularly reach during the last years, concerning *conceptual frameworks and interrelations between formal, non formal and informal learning*, mainly focusing on the pedagogical dimension instead of the institutional one, as occurs in many contributions promoted by the European Union, where recognition and validation of non formal and informal learning are treated as a mainstream to achieve Lisbon – Copenhagen processes goals, in many cases without considering the relevant implications of recognition in rethinking learning modalities;
- last, but absolutely not least, we recognise a significant debt to the literature dealing with *narrative approaches to learning*, and more in general the use of evocation, verbalisation and written production as means for reflective learning.

Studies and researches concerning ageing of immigrants in the European hosting countries have to be considered in the start-up phase, in spite of a phenomenon that since the last decade of the XX century has seen a significant increasing trend. In our work, dealing with the Swiss context, we referred essentially to the data produced by the Federal Office of Statistics, providing us with clear indications concerning quantitative and qualitative indicators of the above mentioned increase (see also Höpflinger, 1999), and on some studies presented in an important conference held in Bern in 1999, dedicated to the issues of ageing and migration (EKA, Pro Senectute, 1999). As we will state more in details in the next paragraph, these studies dealt above all with themes related to new social demands produced by the ageing of immigrants in Switzerland, comparing often the situation of Switzerland and Germany, for the proximity of the migrations flows – and of consequent key problems - that have occurred in two countries after the second world war. Some of the surveys produced in the second half of the '90 still remain fundamental to analyse actual trends of ageing and migration. In general we could quote the works of Fibbi, Bolzman and Vial (1999), reading the processes in an European perspective, of Pianta (1997) comparing Swiss and German situations, of Bolzman (1999) dedicated to the emerging needs in the field of social services.
Piller (1999) focused the problem from the point of view of changes in welfare systems and social insurances, produced by the tendency of old immigrants to remain in the hosting country, while Möve (1999) highlighted in an anthropological perspective more complex issues concerning ageing in a "diverse culture", such as the need of the immigrants to reformulate in the last phase of their lives the relationships between the two cultures guiding their lives.

During the last years not so many new contributions of "general impact" has been produced in Switzerland on these issues, but mainly empirical researches, based on biographies and case studies, focusing the specific condition of some national groups, above all immigrants of the first generation coming from Mediterranean countries, and mainly from Italy (Dell'Amore Terribile, 2002). It's surprising, for instance, that the wide national research program on migrations and intercultural trends promoted the Confederation at the beginning of the years 2000, has not focused the specific issues related to the transition of immigrants to the third age (see Wicker, Fibbi, Haug, 2003, or Piguet, 2005).
Anyway the theme of ageing and migration rose up in the political debate, and has been focused in many initiatives promoted by Associations, NGOs and municipalities. A national Forum (*Alter und Migration*, www.alter-migration.ch) has been created, and many pilot projects and initiatives has been launched, both aiming at developing new integrative patterns at the cultural level (see also the diffusion of schools and "universities" addressed to the third age) and at coping with the peculiar social demands of old immigrants (see for instance the foundation – in some retirement homes (such as in Zürich) - of departments specially dedicated to foreigner old guests coming from southern European countries.

Moving from the contextual dimension to the conceptual framework of our contribution, we would like to recognise above all the role played – in the design of our research, and in the interpretation of data – by some fundamental theories and books dealing with narrative approaches applied to learning. In our contribution we refer to non formal learning, using this term not in technical way (see CEDEFOP definitions), but in a comprehensive perspective (Bjornavold, 2001), where non-formal learning encompasses informal learning which can be described as unplanned learning in work situations and elsewhere, including also planned and explicit approaches to learning introduced in work organisations and elsewhere, not recognised within the formal education and training system. We

would refer, in other words, to all the kinds of learning occurring in the framework of projects, experiences and activities, such as the one we have studied in deep, in which *intentional learning processes* manifest themselves as the additional, "second level" result of a commitment finalised to produce "first level" deliverables or results of another kind. This would also take in account how and when intentionality of learning becomes evident, both in the planning phase and in the development of the action-training processes.

Considering narrative approaches and tools, which played a fundamental role in the project, our references have to be found in the classical works of Knowles (1989), Demetrio (1995), Bruner (1996, 2002), Atkinson (1998). In parallel we have tried to retain the lessons deriving from the wider context of reflective and experiential approaches to learning, both considering the Anglo-American stream of literature (moving from Dewey to the theories which have focused the affective dimension in learning) and some approaches close to action research and training, such the ones promoted by south-American pedagogists as Paulo Freire (1996).
Moving on the field we have however noticed that many trainers and facilitators involved in the projects seemed to move without an explicit and aware professional background rooted in these approaches. They acted using a mix of common sense, good capacity to acquire the right distance, self control and stimulating attitudes. Our reflections will try to report how competences in non formal learning could be the product of a clever and balanced appropriation, made by these "agents" out of any formal learning pathway, of behaviours theorised by a literature they didn't ever known.

The context: ageing in the hosting country

The recent studies on migration flows highlighted that the tendency of immigrants to return in the country of origin after a more or less long period of permanence in the hosting country remains strong and evident. This is true also in the case of immigration flows entering countries with a solid "tradition" of integration: 50% of the immigrants entering the USA seems for instance actually following this path of "double migration"), when this option has been always present and strong in the case of immigration flows occurring in the European countries. Nevertheless the phenomena related to immigration have to be analysed in an articulated way. The stabilisation of the immigrants of the first generation in the immigration countries of central Europe assumed a growing importance during the recent years. Switzerland represents a paradigmatic laboratory to follow these trends.

**Table 1 – Increasing of aged immigrants in Switzerland, between 1986 and 2005**

Years/ ages	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89	90-94	More than 94	Aged immigrants	Foreign residents	% Aged on pop.
1986	13'707	11'176	9'356	5'997	2'967	962	211	44'376	956'000	4.64
1987	15'323	10'279	9'450	6'073	3'096	1'041	226	45'488	979'000	4.65
1988	17'043	9'540	9'481	6'214	3'173	1'094	218	46'763	1'007'000	4.64
1989	18'329	9'275	9'398	6'458	3'308	1'112	210	48'090	1'040'000	4.62
1990	19'120	10'083	9'166	6'616	3'398	1'135	224	49'742	1'100'000	4.52
1991	19'937	11'289	8'710	6'722	3'480	1'214	243	51'595	1'163'000	4.44
1992	20'745	12'504	8'094	6'710	3'574	1'289	272	53'188	1'214'000	4.38
1993	21'884	13'979	7'540	6'739	3'725	1'384	294	55'545	1'260'000	4.41
1994	23'216	15'166	7'459	6'776	3'879	1'461	295	58'252	1'300'000	4.48
1995	24'792	15'746	8'020	6'550	4'000	1'481	316	60'905	1'330'000	4.58
1996	26'122	16'174	8'974	6'163	3'960	1'468	332	63'193	1'337'000	4.73
1997	27'473	17'003	9'983	5'751	4'004	1'492	332	66'038	1'341'000	4.92
1998	29'181	17'928	11'118	5'380	3'949	1'569	343	69'468	1'348'000	5.15
1999	31'323	19'073	12'053	5'261	4'008	1'618	401	73'737	1'369'000	5.39
2000	33'384	20'453	12'635	5'840	3'906	1'669	396	78'283	1'384'000	5.66
2001	35'898	21'887	13'243	6'679	3'724	1'702	445	83'578	1'419'095	5.89
2002	38'392	23'300	14'028	7'508	3'514	1'776	468	88'986	1'447'312	6.15
2003	41'127	24'832	14'818	8'429	3'300	1'798	502	94'806	1'471'033	6.44
2004	43'761	26'674	15'848	9'155	3'330	1'871	515	101'154	1'495'008	6.77
2005	46'372	28'657	17'159	9'642	3'818	1'813	530	107'991	1'511'937	7.14

Source: Federal Office of Statistics

As highlighted in table 1, between 1986 and 2005 the number of immigrants belonging to the "third age" (over 65 years old), increased from less than 45.000 to about 108.000, following a constant trend (see graphic 1).

In the meanwhile we assisted - anyway - to a parallel, even if discontinuous, increasing of the number of new immigrants, according to a function that immigration flows have always played in Switzerland, allowing to maintain a good equilibrium between generations in a nation characterised since the '30, and particularly after the second world war, by a growing deficit of the birth rate, and by a dangerous negative demographic balance.

Figure 1 – Trends of the foreigner population, between 0 and 64, and over 65 years old. Switzerland - 1986=100
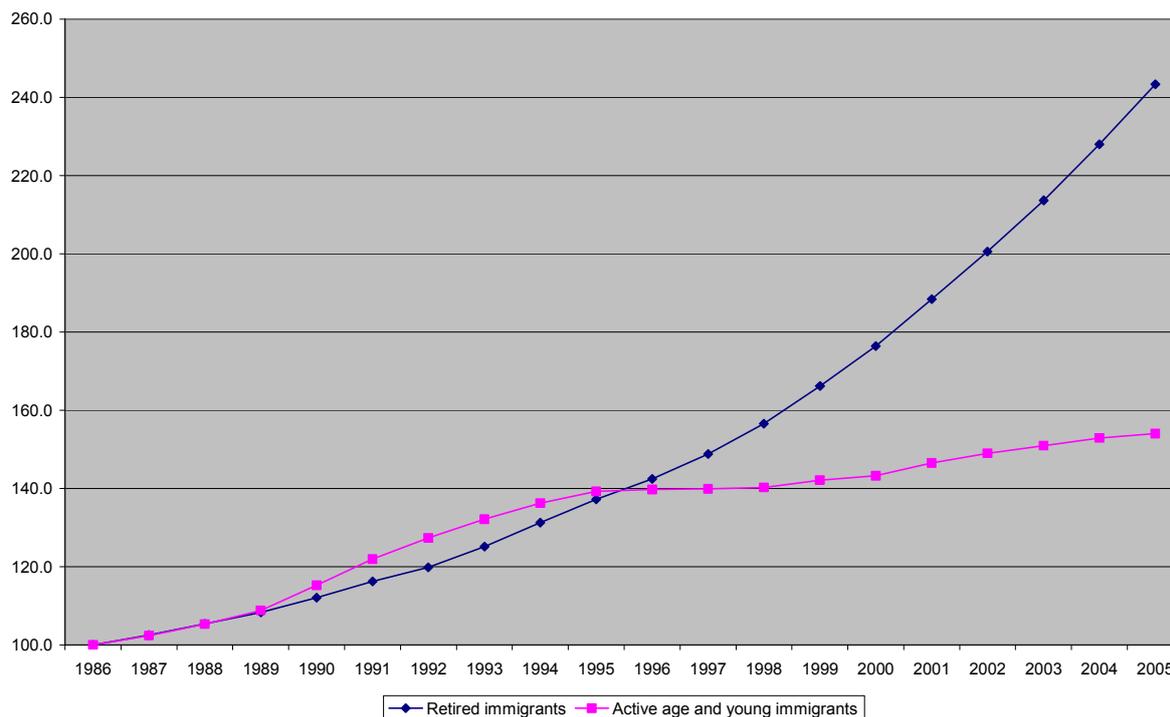
Source: Federal Office of Statistics

The ageing of the immigration communities occurred in Switzerland in a framework of global consolidation and articulation of migration phenomena. During the last 20 years the number of foreigners registered by the Swiss federal authorities grew from less then 1 million, to over 1,5 millions. The presence of young people, and adults belonging to the active age, increased of 54% (particularly in the first half of the '90), both due to new immigrations and to the high birth rate of these communities. But the number of older immigrants rose in the same period of more than 150%, bringing the quota of retired immigrants on the alien population from 4.6% to 7.1%.
Demographic provisional reports foreseen today a trend that is expected to last for the next 20 years. In 2030 the number of retired immigrants should reach over than 150.000 units, with a significant increasing of the older components of the population (over 80).
In addition we should bear in mind that this performance has to be analysed carefully, since the values are for sure underestimating the presence of retired people coming from immigration communities, due to the effects of naturalisation policies. Persons getting the Swiss citizenship are of course cancelled from the statistics concerning foreigners, and a part of that population should be included in the former figures. Even if naturalisation processes has mainly interested during the last decades immigrants of the second generation, meaning youngsters born in Switzerland, for sure the number of

old persons living today in the country which have a foreign origin is larger than the one revealed by the official statistics.

Despite the uncertainty of statistical information, the origins of the phenomena we are speaking about are clear to define: the characteristics of retired immigrant population are actually the mirror of migration waves of the first decades after the second world war. These persons, deciding to break the routine of the early retirement in the country of origin, are above all Italian people (about 40% of the whole community) and in a less significant number Spanish. Two different national groups of retired foreigners follow, from a quantitative point of view, the global community of immigrants coming from southern Europe: there are retired persons of German and French origin. In many cases we are not in front of immigrants, but of old wealthy people deciding to spend their third age in Switzerland. The parallel increasing of old immigrants coming from the Balkan countries and from Turkey is relatively yet slow, but expected to be intensive during the next years (Höpflinger, 1999).

Multiple factors play a significant role in explaining the decision of a growing number of old immigrants to remain in the hosting country after their retirement.
The depletion of the fundamental role of temporary immigration flows is perhaps the most important. Both Swiss migration policies and behaviours of the immigrants nurtured in the past the idea that a problem of integration has never been manifested in Switzerland in spite of the structural contribution that foreigner workers gave to the local economy. Swiss policies aimed at control and manage migration flows, fostering the rotation of immigrant contingents, avoiding the emergence of an explicit demand of integration. The expectation of the migrants, aiming at "reinvesting" in the country of origin gains and competences acquired abroad, represented the other side of the same coin. When this approach found its limits, and the Confederation modified some restrictions of immigration policies, in parallel with the evolution of social and economic patterns, many families were motivated - in a first phase - to grow their children in Switzerland, educating them in the hosting country, preparing in this way the obvious decision of the second generation to play its future there. For many immigrants of the first generation – as the ones we have interviewed in our research - it implied the natural decision to delay, day by day, the time of their return in the country of origin (also when they have planned it, before the age of retirement). So, in a second phase, they had big difficulties in maintaining a stable relational network in the region when they were born, or at least a social frame really motivating them to return after the retirement, although in many case they have built there an house, and they often visit the region during their holidays. Following the life histories of these immigrants we can easily notice how the decision to retire in the hosting country has not be planned in a rational way, but occurred as the logical consequence of events and processes of which these immigrants have not had a clear awareness, which they have not really managed. They have not "prepared" their retirement in the hosting country, but now they have to cope with it, inventing new strategies to play a totally new role, in a different cultural environment.

Other factors contribute of course to the consolidation of the above mentioned trend. From one side the comprehensive extension of welfare systems and social assurances to the immigrants created the premises to survive in the hosting country counting on a decent income, and on good quality services. From the other side the presence of a second and third generation - daughter, sons and nephews growing older in the hosting country - moved these old immigrants of the first generation to focus their interests in Switzerland, although paying strong difficulties to integrate in the local society. A significant role has been finally played by the regional, political and religious Associations promoted by the immigrants, providing these people with opportunities to live less isolated their condition of people retiring in a "*fremd*" (diverse) country.

In Switzerland social research, and scientific studies, discovered the importance of ageing of foreign population only during the recent years (see references). The debate until now focused essentially on the aspects related to the changes caused by the increasing number of immigrants deciding to remain in the hosting country after their retirement from the point of view of the expected impacts on demographic evolution, social insurances systems, services.
In some cases the focus has been put on phenomena related to the specific risks related to the transition from the active life to the third age of a relatively fragile component of the population:
- poverty and social disease, due to the weaker social protection of the immigrants
- social and cultural exclusion, due to the loss of "identity" (from the social acceptance of the immigrant as a worker, to the distance of the retired immigrant from the local cultural patterns, with a poor and ghettoised relational network)

The social research on services and health care sector highlighted the peculiar problems linked to the transition to the third age of the immigrants (Fibbi et alia, 1999).

Only in a limited number of studies, and more in the framework of action-researches and pilot projects, emerged a growing interest to the issues related to the demand of social and cultural visibility rising from these components of the population. Building new identities, moving between more roles, beyond the traditional roots of work as a source of acceptation, became a clear objective for the immigrants.

In this framework a certain number of studies and projects have been dealing also with the opportunities and threats related to the transition to retirement as "*locus of memory*", actual chance to reflect on life experiences, to build up new identities and cultural bridges. The project we took as a "case study" belongs to this social practice.

Transition makes sense: learning through intergenerational / intercultural exchange

Menschen und Geschichten (MuG) has been a successful experience, proving the transferability of a method based on the key role of learning *through* and *from* a biographical reflection, in managing the transition to the third age. Four editions of this pilot project has been realised between 2003 and 2006 in Bern, Bienne, Winterthur and Neuchatel, involving mainly old Italian immigrants of the first generation. In two cases (Bienne and Neuchatel) the project involved people living in the French speaking part of the country (an important aspect, because Italian immigrants had normally less difficulties in mastering French language, integrating at the local level). In other two cases MuG involved inhabitants of the Swiss German cantons. Globally the project committed about 40 participants, with a majority of women, corresponding to the figures available for the entire population of the same age. The participants visited sessions, lessons and laboratories, according to the pathway described in figure 2.

Figure 2 – *Menschen und Geschichten.* Activities and learning processes

Phase	*Activities*	*Learning processes*
Recruiting	Meetings, door-to-door animation, activation of proximity networks	Socialisation, group building, learning to cooperate
Biographical labs	Collective / individual biographical evocation; participants exchange their life experiences, they pick up fairy tales and stories from their memories	Elaboration of life experiences, reformulation of intercultural interlaces, learn to cope with their new role in society
Writing Labs	Under the guide and the accompaniment of the trainers and facilitators, the participants apply some general guide lines concerning the "rules" to be followed in producing a written tale, formalising on paper their stories, using an editing software	Respect written narration rules, enhancing their written language skills, learning to use in a simple way an editor (Word for Windows), and more in general the PC as a tool to acquire and manage information
Reciting Labs	Under the guide and the accompaniment of the trainers and facilitators, the participants apply some general guide lines concerning recitation, exposing in an oral way, inside the group, their written tales	Learn to expose in front of an audience, in a second language, a short tale, enhancing their mastery of oral language, developing self-confidence
Reciting sessions	The participants narrate their stories in front of the classrooms of young pupils (compulsory school age); they answer to the questions of the pupils and of their teachers	Learn to cope with their new role, learn to throw down their anxieties and fears, validate their learning processes (reactions of the pupils), acquire awareness of their potentialities (dignity of their new role as "retired immigrants" in the hosting country

The project was based on a sequence of activities, implying both collective moments and an individual work assisted by the trainers. Every activity had both actual goals, related to tasks that have to be

accomplished by the participants approaching the final deliverable (reciting sessions in front of the pupils), and pedagogical objectives, focused on learning more then teaching. The participants perceived clearly the 2 dimensions; learning was the mean allowing them to achieve challenging goals, such as writing tales and short biographical stories in local languages, sometimes with the help of the animators, and presenting their stories, in a narrative oral way, to classrooms of the region in which they lived. The pilot project of Bern produced also a book, containing a selection of written stories and biographies in Italian and German languages.

The project has been designed to promote the exchange between generations and cultures, in order to avoid that the youngsters of the third or second generation of immigration were deprived of a fundamental component of their roots, moving from households to the schools. At the same time it aimed at giving visibility to the immigration "background" of Swiss social history, let Swiss youngsters and teachers create a positive contact with "diversities" imported by the immigrants. The project pursued also intentional learning objectives, but in a non formal way. It was not a course to prepare retirement, nor a language, ICT alphabetisation, writing or "reciting" course, but a collective reflective learning experience, that should allow the people realising actual progresses in all the above mentioned fields, intended as key issue for an aware intercultural and intergenerational transition.

The participants globally reached the expected goals. As we will better argument, they succeed moving step by step. In many cases they really accepted hard challenges, such as the use of a second language, German or French, never learned in a proper way, acting as a "lecturer" in front of a "severe" youngsters audience. They moved from the explicit tasks which they have accepted to accomplish, to the implicit learning goals *intentionally* disseminated along the pathway. For the learners, in fact, the intentionality of learning resulted mainly an unexpected, progressive emerging, result of the project, rather than a rational achievement to be reached. And they engage them in learning with enthusiastic commitment, both for this reason, and thanks to their curious and pro-active attitude towards the problems, clearly emerging from their biographies. The need to manage in a positive way their transition to the third age, running away from isolation, made the sense of their learning.

Focus on learning

The project shows us the role of transitions – both related to intercultural challenges and to ageing - as a possible as a catalyst of learning. Three key transition are simultaneously present:
- intergenerational transition, considering ageing processes, implying in the case of retired migrants a complex shifting, from the role gained by them through their participation at the job market of the hosting country to a new uncertain role as elder deprived by their biographies, in the new social context, of the leading role in the community traditionally assigned to the old people by the rural cultures of origin
- intercultural transition, strictly interlaced with the above mentioned change of the structural patterns of their "identity" in the hosting country: the project tried to value this challenge, supporting the retired immigrants, asked to move between two cultures, in a changing relational environment (from workplace to the community), and in the meanwhile producing a provocative intergenerational exchange, providing young pupils with the evidences of intercultural patterns of their identities, fostering them to rethink in a dynamic way the sources of their identities
- transitions occurring in the learning dimension: the project valued informal learning patterns, acting in a non formal way to foster intentional and aware acquisition of new competences.

The characteristics of the participants played an important role in letting transition succeed. The most of them are immigrants which moved to Switzerland during the '50, with low level of education, and without recognised qualifications, and in many cases without a vocational training at all. They had the opportunity to quickly integrate themselves in an open job market, characterised by the growing demand of industrial workforce, in a typical tayloristic environment, where the people could be introduced at the workplace by simple coaching phases. In their stories, these immigrants often remember their introduction at the workplace, an unknown technological, but well structured, place to be: "*vedrai che imparerai*" (you will learn without any problem), was the welcoming statement. And this created an attitude to accept the challenges, to learn by doing, enhanced by the life experiences in an hosting country that outside the firms revealed a thin hostility or at least a substantial closure to these "*Gastarbeiter*" (workers temporary hosted in the country). They built in 30, sometimes 40 years

of work a strong identity, as "good workers", appreciated for being reliable. Now they are confronted with a new challenge, but they seem to be able to transfer attitudes forged by immigration in repositioning their identities through learning, acquiring awareness of what they learned in an informal way, transforming it in aware learning.

In this process some requirements played an important function. We are in front of curious people, open to cope with diversities, able to read with open mind the reality of the society surrounding them. But we are also in presence of a relatively "selected" audience, people participating from the beginning of their immigration years to the associative life of the community, as trade unionists, member of immigrants associations, persons committed in political movements. People that built step by step the habitude to claim for having voice.

In spite of their poor educational pathway, these immigrants showed, during the proceedings of the project, such as in the focus groups, an impressive capacity to plan and put in practice individual learning strategies. They learned for instance local languages in quite all the case in an informal way, through the exposition at the workplace and societal environment. Maria's story allows us to reveal the sense of these learning strategies. 70 years old, a background characterised by a double emigration (arrived in Trentino as a refugee coming from the regions of Istria (former Yugoslavia), lost by Italy after the second world war, and then moved to Switzerland following the husband), Maria used all the life a small exercise book to note and memorise verbs, words, expression in the local languages. This exercise-book has been actually more than a tool to learn speaking in some way Swiss-German dialect: it was for Maria the way to elaborate the lost opportunity to complete the school, to gain an education when she was young. These immigrants seems us to be able to capture all the potentialities of informal and non formal learning not in opposition with the scholastic approach, but thanks to the *double equipment* provided by the learning abilities acquired in their lives and by the nostalgic positive memory they have of the school. They regret – in other words – not to have had the possibility to complete their education, early drop out from the school because of the cultural convictions of the families (in the case of the women) or forced by economic pressures obliging men to find immediately a job when they were 14 or 15 years old.

Reflective learning, and the use of narration as a fundamental mean to start-up reflection, have been both exploited in the project. Narration has been utilised to foster reflection. Biographies, highlighting challenges which immigrants had to cope with, represented a source to make reflection possible; also stories and fairy tales provided an opportunity to reflect. According with Dewey, we can say that the project witnessed how reflection springs from a difficulty or a conflict perceived by the learner. Although reflection grows from difficulty, doubt and surprise, all emotionally laden concepts, in Dewey's thinking it acquire the meaning of a fundamental cognitive act. "*The word reason is connected etymologically with the word ratio. The underlying idea here is exactness of relationship. All reflective thinking is a process of detecting relations*" (Dewey. 1974). Elaborating their experiences the participants to the project detected in a clear way relationships guiding their learning pathway in transition: intergenerational relations, intercultural and social ones.

Narration and challenges provided by the project, such in the case of reciting sessions in front of the pupils, contributed to create the catalyst conditions for reflective learning:
- the possibility of breaking the routines
- the strong focus on the individual, even when histories, biographies and stories are shared in the collective dimension
- the contextual and relational dimension (physical intergenerational exchange), providing a "place" where implementing and consolidating a new role, and a new identity, in the hosting country.

The project witness the importance of a stimulating and challenging goal in every kind of learning. Evocation and narration provide the key to transform an emotional experience in a resource to build up a new role. In the meanwhile narration and writing, providing who is committed in doing so, with the right distance from the events, allow the elaboration of painful memories, that in some case remind to the participants to separations, disillusions, lost opportunities, injustices proved in the hosting countries.

Trainers and facilitators played a fundamental role, clearly recognised by the participants. Contamination between teaching and facilitating learning characterised their action. In the meanwhile a "light presence" seems us at the base of their intervention. They acted as animators, particularly in the first phase of the project (when they had to recruit the participants, motivating them to accept the challenges included in the pathway), and then mediators and moderators. In the memories of the

participants, the "teachers", as they usually name the "agents" operating in the project, are nice people, "*travelling companions*", learning partners, able to provide structures and information (when needed), but encouraging the autonomy, and above all demonstrating affection.

From many points of view the "agents" we have interviewed applied, without having studied it, the philosophy of an action-research pathway, moving in some cases as Freire suggests, through the proposition of themes and questions which had the scope of stimulating the discussion and to move memories, in order to facilitate biographical exercise. The participants remember now the cooperative building of their learning pathways, and the climate in which also teaching took place, when it was absolutely useful to achieve the planned goals. The project highlights, anyway, how the objectives of the "first level" - that in our cases have been represented by the actual deliverables (written stories, editing in a readable format, reciting…) – have to be constantly focused by facilitators in their relationship with the learners, which are available to play their role of learners (second level framework) only avoiding the sensation to live an artificial experience. In this sense intentionality and informality of learning have to be strictly interlaced, letting the first emerging step by step, pursuing a right balance between doing and reflecting. The ability to *manage the unexpected* – from the emotional and practical point of view – transforming it in an opportunity to consolidate competences through the reflection, characterises the activity of these facilitators.

To sum up, considering the learning dimension, the project suggests some evidences:
- a reach and powerful transition to the third age in the hosting country should be prepared at best by an aware participation to the active life, where both the workplace and community networks play an integrative role, creating dignity and habitude to claim voice
- community networks are a place of interaction and contextualisation, providing one of the key dimensions of reflective learning
- in any informal or non formal learning practice is the relevance of the main goal of the activity in the pathway (writing and telling stories, publishing them) that makes the difference, with respect to the complementary intentional goals of learning, that have to be enhanced in a light way, managing step by step learning events produced by the project
- learning occurring in non formal contexts makes sense if it is recognised by the learners as an aware process, allowing the acquisition of competences to be spent beyond the limits of the initiatives creating the opportunity to learn.

Some requirements are needed:
- curiosity and socialisation of the learners, and a good self-confidence with the assets of learning by doing can help in a substantial way the process
- a positive attitude towards learning has to be considered independently from the fact that we are in front of early school leavers; a nostalgic memory of the school – intended as a lost chance, and not an uncomfortable place to be – foster adults to consider later on learning as a precious second chance.

Summing up

Retired migrant workers have to cope, in the transition phase to the third age, with a double challenge: they grow older and the focus of their lives changes and at the same time they should rethink and restructure their integration pathway from the working place (providing the migrant with a clear and accepted role to play) to the construction of a new identity in the societal framework.

Reflecting on their biographies they learn to cope with these challenges, building up motivations that "make sense" and enhance their learning capabilities

Verbalisation of migrants biographies and narration of the tales are two powerful instruments allowing the learning process occurs in a positive way, reducing psychological threats hampering - in the framework of traditional courses - the socialisation with a local language or the use of an ICT tool

The intergenerational exchange facilitates the intercultural approach, giving dignity and visibility to the differences and at the same time showing that all the identities are involved in complex evolution and transformation processes

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