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Theoretical models of participation in adult education: The need for an integrated model.

Boeren, E., Nicaise, I. & Baert, H.

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ABSTRACT: The European Union has set a goal that by 2010, 12.5% of the working age population should be taking part in lifelong learning. This participation rate has not yet been achieved in many countries. A partial explanation is the fact that the decision to participate depends on a variety of factors at three levels: the individual, the educational provisions, and the socio-economic context, including the regulating authorities. The authors of this article provide insights into the matching process in the educational market, discussing the relevant literature on this issue, including the modelling used in the research literature. In the final section of the article, the authors present an outline of an integrated model of participation in adult education, aimed at creating a better understanding of the complexity of participation and the factors that affect the three levels of the educational market.

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1. Context

By 2010, the European Union intended to have evolved into the most competitive and knowledge-based region in the world, with an emphasis on stronger economic growth and greater social cohesion (European Commission, 2001). Participation in lifelong learning is being put forward as the catalyst for the achievement of these objectives. By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, 12.5% of the European population between the ages of 25 and 64 should be participating in some mode of lifelong learning. This key idea was formulated by the leaders who attended the Summit of Heads of State and Government in Lisbon (2000). The statistics relating to this participation target, however, do not present an optimistic picture. The participation rates among and within the European countries vary widely, with huge inequalities among the various socio-economic strata in their populations (OECD, 2003). The overall trend is not always positive, as some countries are scoring weaker than some years ago and the drop-out rate is known to be rather high. Compared to the ease with which these intentions to increase participation are formulated, actual participation in an educational activity is the result of a complex and sensitive decision-making process (Baert, 1998; Cross, 1981). In the period running up to and during the participation itself, participants develop perceptions of the educational activity, which leads to the decision to persist in or drop out of the educational programme (Baert, De Rick & Van Valckenborgh, 2006). But how can we understand the complexity of this process that is facilitating or inhibiting participation in adult education programmes?

The purpose of this contribution is to provide systematic insights into the existing theories and models in relation to this participation and the perception processes in educational activities for adults. In the first section, we will describe the inequality in knowledge and skills between the different strata of the population. We conclude that

individuals with a high need for learning participate very little (Desjardins, Rubenson & Milana, 2006).

In the next section, we will explain the functioning of the market for adult education, and we will examine the factors affecting the decision-making process to participate for different groups of adults. In the third section, we will discuss some of the major theoretical models from the international literature that describe participation processes in educational activities. After the discussion of these models, in the fourth section, we will assess these models, on the basis of the collected literature, in relation to the unequal distribution of knowledge and skills and the mismatch between supply and demand. Inspired by this critical review of these models, we will finally construct and discuss our own theoretical model.

2. The unequal distribution of knowledge and skills

Knowledge and skills are unequally distributed. In the field of knowledge, we can make a distinction between low-educated, medium-educated, and highly-educated adults (OECD, 2003). In addition to the differences in educational attainment levels, we can also look at the differences in basic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic (OECD, 2000).

The *International Adult Literacy Survey* revealed that certain groups in the population have insufficient skills to participate normally in today's society. People with a low socio-economic status, migrants, low-educated, the elderly, and economically inactive people are designated as groups with above-average risks of being low-skilled and low-literate (Desjardins et al, 2006). The results of the *Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey* are similar.

Those who have little knowledge and skills can increase these by taking part in educational activities. However, statistics show that vulnerable groups are least likely to participate in some form of education (Van Woensel, 2006).

TABLE 1

Table 1 shows that high-educated adults within the European Union participate seven times more in educational activities than low-educated adults. Young people take part approximately 2.5 times more than the elderly, and other differences also exist, based on labour market status. The differences by gender are smaller.

Participation rates also vary widely between countries (OECD, 2003). Countries showing weaker scores for knowledge and skill levels also score weaker in relation to participation rates in lifelong learning. The Scandinavian countries achieve the best figures, and the southern countries, the worst.

Measuring disparities in participation is one point; acquiring insights into the mechanisms provoking these inequalities and trying to eliminate them is another matter. On the basis of the international literature, we offer an overview of the factors affecting participation, and we explain how a participation or nonparticipation in the educational market is achieved.

3. Determinants of participation

In order to participate in an educational activity, a successful match must occur between different levels in the educational market (OECD, 2005). This market consists of three levels: the individuals who, due their needs and requirements, explicitly ask for education; the educational institutions offering their programmes; and the authorities, who more or less regulate both the demand and supply interaction between individuals and educational institutions. The authorities are able to do this by providing financial stimuli, by reducing the indirect costs, by offering services, and by other means. These components of the educational market can be summarised in figure 1.

FIGURE 1

We emphasize again that the educational market consists of a combination of the three levels. In our review of the literature, we are also interested in the question of *which factors at the individual level, the educational institution level, and the regulating authorities' level affect or determine the participation of adults in educational activities*. We refer to these levels below.

3.1. Individual level

Generally speaking, we distinguish two main approaches within the literature regarding educational participation at the individual level: one based on the socio-economic and cultural dimension, and the other based on the psychological dimension (Jung & Cervero, 2002).

Socio-economic and cultural dimension.

In the economic, social, and cultural dimension, we start from the above-described paradox of the unequal demand for lifelong learning (Nicaise, 2003). As already mentioned, people with a high need for education participate less. The following overview provides insights regarding the background of this mismatch.

The *Human Capital Theory* starts from the main idea that people can invest in educational activities with the aim of increasing their productivity and skills (Becker, 1964). An increase in productivity on the labour market is mentioned first, but upgraded skills also can have a positive impact on the person's daily life. Modern society also relates human capital to the ability to pursue more well-being in other fields, such as culture, social participation, and health. The *Rational Choice Theory*, which is related to the *Human Capital Theory*, starts from the principle that humans always try to achieve maximum welfare and

minimum costs when pursuing goals (Allingham, 2002). The decision to participate, therefore, can be seen as being based on a cost-benefit analysis.

Costs consist of direct and indirect costs. Direct costs are costs directly incurred, such as the payment of the enrolment fee. The indirect costs include the extra costs incurred due to the participation in the educational activity, such as child care payments, neglecting household duties and the loss of earnings because time normally spent on work is now being spent on learning. On a general level, we can state that these indirect costs often outweigh the direct costs.

Benefits. Various effects of lifelong learning, such as increased productivity in the workplace, the opportunity for promotion, the opportunity for obtaining a higher salary, or successful application to a new job, have to be emphasised. We also can recognise some benefits within a person's private life, such as better health, more social contacts, and the ability to pursue a hobby. It is important to note, however, that these benefits become visible only after a certain period of time, with no guarantee that they will certainly appear.

Balance between costs and benefits. The balance between costs and benefits is specific for each individual (OECD, 2003). Within certain socio-economic groups, this balance leads to a reduced participation as the benefits do not overrule the costs. Desjardins, Rubenson and Milana (2006) analysed participation rates in lifelong learning based on different surveys, such as the *International Adult Literacy Survey* (IALS), the *Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey* (ALL), and the *Eurobarometer* on lifelong learning. Women, older people, adults with a weak socio-economic background, those who are low-skilled, adults with insufficient literacy, adults employed in jobs requiring few skills, the unemployed, and migrants turned out to be the groups who were least likely to participate in educational activities.

The phenomenon of older people participating less in educational activities is confirmed several times within the literature (Bélanger, 1997; Doets, et al., 2001; Edwards, et

al., 1996). Older people have less long-term prospects in the labour market, making an investment in their job-related skills less attractive. The costs are probably just as high as for other age groups, but the benefits are lower, as the updated knowledge and skills will not be applied for a long time. This means that they and their employers are less prepared to invest in educational activities. Another explanation is that the competencies of the elderly are often obsolete, which makes it more difficult for them to take part in an educational activity, as they often lack the required starting competencies (Jacobs & van der Kamp, 1998).

Women also appear to receive less support from their employers (OECD, 2003). They report more family-related obstacles (OECD, 2001). It has also been noted that women have different patterns of participation than men (Houtkoop & van der Kamp, 1992). Women participate more in leisure-oriented educational activities, while men participate more in vocationally-oriented educational activities. Similar findings on gender and participation can also be found in the work of Hayes (1989), Sargent and Tuckett (1999), and Tuijnman and Schuller (1999).

A poor socio-economic background is often related to the level of educational attainment of the parents (Desjardins, et al, 2006). As Bourdieu (1973) showed in his work, the parental environment is an important place for transferring cultural values, which significantly influence subsequent educational and career choices. He expressed these ideas using his term *habitus*. Findings regarding socio-economic background and participation in training are largely present within the scientific literature (Brookover, 1979; Coleman, 1966; Collins, Moles & Cross, 1982; de Graaf & Wolbers, 2003; Field, 2000; Ganzeboom, 1989; Kreft, 1993; Nesbit, 2006; Willis, 1977).

In addition to the parents' educational attainment level, statistics show that a person's own educational attainment has an even greater impact on the decision to participate in adult education activities. Adults with a high level of participation in the past have a higher level of

confidence and fewer negative learning experiences (Illeris, 2003). Our current knowledge-based society constantly calls for employees with a high level of knowledge and skills because they are better trained workers and thus more productive in the labour market. High-skilled workers have more chances of success in knowledge-intensive and rapidly changing job situations, making it more attractive for employers to invest in them, as they have a higher level of employability and trainability (OECD, 2003).

The findings mentioned above clearly show that successful groups in the labour market have many more opportunities to participate in adult education. Rubenson also mentions this phenomenon is his expression “the long arm of the job” (Rubenson, in press). Financial support or other incentives offered by the employer are non-existent for unemployed persons, resulting in high costs without certainty of benefits. It is clear that having a job is an important determinant.

Psychological dimension

In addition to socio-economic and cultural factors, the psychological characteristics of the adult also have an impact on participation. Keller (1987) indicated that a positive attitude to learning, recognition of the relevance of the learning activity for one’s own life, confidence in one’s own abilities, and an experience of satisfaction are indispensable for launching successful participation in educational activities.

Keller (1987) summarized his reasoning using the concept of *motivation*. Several researchers have shown that the reasons to participate in adult education can be very diverse. Generally speaking, there is a distinction between job- and non-job-oriented reasons, but various authors have pointed out that this difference is only slight and both types of reasons often overlap (Courtney, 1992). In addition, motivation arises from an individual’s interest in the learning activity and the personal value attached to it, or from an external pressure which

forces the individual to participate in order to obtain rewards or to avoid sanctions. The first type of motivation is called *autonomous*; the second type is *controlled* (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Vansteenkiste et al., 2005). In accordance with Houle (1961), we can distinguish three types of adult students: those who register to achieve a certain personal goal; those who are enrolled in a course because they like to participate in this type of activities; and those who are genuinely interested in learning.

Blunt and Yang (1995) found that the intrinsic value of adult education for one's own life, the importance of the adult education experience for society at large, and the experience of learning for pleasure are major determining factors that influence a person's decision to participate in adult educational activities. The authors grouped these values under the heading of *attitude*.

Finally, mentioning *confidence* and perceived self-efficacy is also important. Those who have been involved in negative learning experiences in the past have little faith in their own abilities. Their self-image as a learning adult is rather weak, and this can be a decisive factor in deciding whether to participate in educational activities (Crossan, et al. 2003). The Eurobarometer, as mentioned in Desjardins et al. (2006), showed that 43% of the total sample population indicated that their self-perception played a role in the decision process. Similar findings of lack of confidence and support are also present within the research by Beder (1990), Ellsworth (1991), and Hayes (1988).

3.2. Educational institution level

In the individual level section above, we described the position of the individual experiencing a (possible) need for education which can be transformed into a (potential) demand for education (Baert, 1998). People sometimes wrongly assume that the offer is quasi-precisely tailored to meet the needs of all these individuals, but this does not appear to

be entirely correct (Nicaise, 2003). Programme formats and conditions for admission to learning activities often focus on the middle class. Adults must pay enrolment fees, comply with certain enrolment conditions, and have control over certain social and cultural capital in order to function within the educational activity successfully.

Instruments and measures to overcome barriers deserve explicit attention. Examples include the recognition of prior experiential learning, counselling of socially disadvantaged groups, introduction of quality assurance, and collaboration with relevant others, such as employment officers, social welfare officers, and educational advisers. In this regard, interventions at the level of the educational institutions can also be seen as catalysts in the generation of greater demand on the individual side.

Within the literature, we found a certain amount of information on variables within the field of school effectiveness, focusing on the achievements of pupils in compulsory education. The *Equality of Educational Opportunity Report* of Coleman et al. (1966) was a pioneering attempt to measure the impact of institutional level variables in the educational context. Coleman concluded that the schools' characteristics have little impact on the differences in performance among the pupils. According to him, inequalities were mainly determined by the socio-economic characteristics of the pupils themselves. Jencks (1972) and Thorndike (1973) also drew similar conclusions. Pupils bring their socio-economic inequalities into school, and during their school career these social disparities largely persist.

The conclusions of Coleman (1966) were strongly criticised because of his narrow focus on the economic and material aspects of schools. In his research, he neglected learning processes within the educational institution. In reaction to this approach, a second wave of investigations into school effectiveness arose during the late 1970s. Mortimore (1988) is one of the most important names in this movement. He came to the conclusion that it is not the

material aspects of the school but, more importantly, the attitude of the teachers and the development of a pleasant social environment which have an impact on the performance of the pupils. A school with a positive learning climate emphasises reward and encouragement instead of punishment, encourages individual development of the students, and fosters the enjoyment of students and teachers working together.

A question which continues to be raised as a result of the work of Mortimore is the direction of the relationship: Does the positive learning climate lead to better learning performance or vice versa? Other researchers who showed that the school can definitely make a difference are Brookover (1979), Rutter (1979), Slavin (1996), Van Damme et al. (2004) and Dupriez and Dumay (2006).

Other studies on adult education have identified specific characteristics of the learning process and the educational institution that play a role in attracting and satisfying adult students. Schuetze and Slowey (2002) concluded that flexible access to the curriculum, alternative study methods, financial aid, the provision of support services (such as child care, study advice services, job services, and welfare services) and the granting of related benefits (such as the distribution of public transport tickets, offering Internet access, or giving access to sports facilities) positively attract adults. Darkenwald and Valentine (1986) constructed the Adult Classroom Environment Scales to determine classroom environment perceptions. Using this scale, the researchers showed that a positive learning climate is linked to higher involvement, more teacher support, clearer task orientation, more personal goal attainment, more structured and clear organization, and greater influence of the adult students themselves on the process. Baert et al. (2006) described the importance of the educational institutions-level context characteristics in the decision making process preceding (potential) participation in educational activities. In this regard, educators and administrators must create a positive learning climate within their educational institutions and in the overall educational context of

a country. Although it has been shown that the factors at the level of the educational institutions can affect the attraction of adult learners within the adult education system, the development of specific goals, benchmarks and indicators on this level in between the individual and the regulation authorities remains weak (European Commission, 2008). Moreover, survey instruments developed in order to collect information on participation in adult education provide less information about the characteristics of and the processes within the learning institutions themselves.

3.3 Country level

The literature reviewed until now refers to the numerous factors, both individual and institutional, which can contribute to a successful match between supply and demand, resulting in participation in an educational activity. Statistics show differences in participation, not only among the different layers of the population, but also among the various countries (OECD, 2003). These findings encourage experts to pay attention to the country-level side.

When examining the difficulties experienced during the decision making process by candidate adult learners, we must note that the barriers are similar in almost all countries (Rubenson, in press). The fact that the participation numbers differ is related to the different ways governments offer support to overcome these barriers. Countries with similar participation rates often have striking similarities in a wide range of policy fields (Desjardins et al, 2006).

With regard to participation in lifelong learning, we can distinguish four basic European groups. The first group includes the Scandinavian countries and Iceland. The participation rates within these countries are nearly 50% or higher on an annual basis. The second group includes the Anglo-Saxon countries, with participation rates between 35% and

50%. The third group includes the Western European countries, such as Belgium, Germany, and France, but also some southern European countries, such as Spain, Italy, and Slovenia. The figures for these countries vary between 20% and 35%. The final group includes Southern European countries, such as Portugal and Greece, and also some Eastern European countries, such as Poland and Hungary. The participation rates for this group are the lowest, generally below 20%. Different from the 12.5 % target as used within the European policy documents, most surveys, as the Labour Force Survey and the Adult Education Survey, use a reference period of 12 months instead of 4 weeks. Therefore, these participation statistics are all higher than 12.5 %. On an annual basis, the European average is 35.7 % (Boateng, 2009).

It is striking that the grouping by rate of educational participation shows great similarities with the welfare state regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1989; Leibfried, 1992; Titmuss, 1974). Countries within the same group show not only a similar cultural or historical development but are also comparable in terms of labour market policy, education policy, social security, and economic system. From these findings, we can assume that national welfare state systems influence the decisions of adults to participate in educational activities later in life. Previous research has explored which system characteristics influence the unequal participation between countries and the social inequalities revealed within these participation rates (Desmedt, Groenez and Van den Broeck, 2006). The employment rate and the innovation rate within a country seemed to have a positive impact. Innovation leads to a higher demand for learning, but is also an indirect player, as more innovation leads to higher employment. The workplace itself is an important supplier in educational activities. Within the EU, work related training accounts for around 84% of all lifelong learning activities. Moreover, institutional differentiation within the initial education system was found to be a direct influencer on participation. Countries with more comprehensive education systems show higher participation rates in lifelong learning. On the one hand, we can hypothesize that

pupils within these systems are less confronted with failure and thus develop a more positive attitude towards learning. On the other hand, we can argue that participation in later life is needed due to lack of specialisation within the initial education track. As regards social inequalities in participation, government interventions in the field of education and active labour market policies seemed to play an important role. Less inequalities observed in countries supporting a comprehensive education system and in countries spending higher amounts on active labour market programmes.

4. Theoretically constructed participation models

In the above overview, we discussed different factors on different levels on the basis of findings from various studies on educational participation. Participation appears to be the result of a combination of factors on these three levels: therefore, its analysis calls for integration within a single comprehensive model. We assume that factors concerning the individuals, the educational institutions and the countries interact with each other, and it is our aim to visualize this interaction in a single diagram. In the following section of this paper, we will describe a selection of such frameworks commonly found in the international literature (Manninen, 2005; Silva, Cahalan, Lacireno-Paquet, 1998). In the next section, we also will evaluate to what extent these models effectively and appropriately integrate the three levels described above.

Fishbein and Ajzen (1980) developed the *Theory of Reasoned Action*. This theory starts from the personal need to have a certain intention in order to perform a specific behaviour. The authors described two basic determinants underlying this model: the attitude with respect to the behaviour, and the social norm. An attitude is created by certain ideas about the behaviour, which are translated into a preference for or rejection of the behaviour itself. The social norm refers to the pressure experienced by a person's immediate

surroundings. The views of others have an impact on the behaviour of the specific individual, even if one person conforms more to the expectations of his social contacts than the other.

Boshier (1973) developed the congruence model in order to gain knowledge and insight about the decision to participate in learning activities. According to the model, participation is achieved by an agreement between the individual and administrators in his educational environment. The author of this model also stated that a successful match can have a cumulative effect mediated by the social and psychological characteristics of the individual. The determinants include the social class of adults as well as the characteristics of the educational environment. This model clearly integrates the sociological and psychological theoretical insights on the level of the individual with the factors on the level of the educational institution.

Smith (1980) created the *Interdisciplinary Sequential Specificity Time Allocation and Lifetime* (ISSTAL) model, which was specifically applied to the adult education system by Cookson (1986). The model consists of a number of variables that play a role in the decision to participate in adult education. The variables are linked together, but the sooner they occur in the design—and thus are more situated on the left side of the model—the smaller the role they play in the decision-making process. The first step in the model consists of the external social context, which in turn affects the individual socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics, together with the social roles. The next step in the model consists of four groups of psychological variables: evaluation by the individual; intellectual capacities; attitudes; and the collection of knowledge, perceptions, images, ideas, and plans. Finally, there are the situational variables in the model, which consist of the context-specific elements, including an understanding of the situation. Following Cookson, the latter variables have the strongest influence on the decision to participate.

The *Expectancy Valence Model* of Rubenson (1977) also starts from an interaction between the individual and his environment. On a personal level, previous educational experience, individual needs, and personal characteristics play a role. As for the environment, the most important variables are the individual's own welfare, the standards of that person's reference group, and the availability of educational opportunities. The *valence* in the model refers to the value that an individual attaches to the participation, and the *expectancy* refers to specific hopes with regard to successful participation in an educational activity. A combination of valence and expectancy can lead to a motivational force, which can be converted into participation in an educational activity.

The *Chain of Response Model* of Cross (1981) can be considered to represent a cycle of decision-making processes through which an individual passes. The emphasis in the model is on psychological and environmental variables. The model starts with a person's self-perception in terms of whether the individual considers that he or she can be successful within the educational activity. This is clearly linked to educational attitude. The next step is formed by the expectations and the values attached to participation. A decision to participate is also linked with the life transitions made by the individual, such as giving birth or retirement. These transitions may make it more difficult for a person to participate in or to detect new possibilities and the need for participation. The final steps in the model consist of balancing opportunities and obstacles and having access to necessary information. Cross distinguished between situational, dispositional and institutional barriers, in which the first is linked to the individual's living environment, the second to the individual's psychological characteristics, and the third to the characteristics of the educational institution and educational opportunities. The final step in the model consists of the actual decision whether or not to participate.

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) developed the *Psychosocial Interaction Model*, putting great emphasis on social environment factors and the socio-economic status of the

individual. This model starts with the background characteristics of the individual, the family, and the social environment of the childhood and adolescent years, all of which strongly influence the school career, and thus have an impact on the socio-economic status in adulthood. The next step is the pressure experienced to participate in education. The researchers also describe the perceived value and usefulness of participating in education, the tendency to take part, the incentives received from others and, finally, the barriers to be overcome in order to participate. As the final step in the model, a probability prediction of effective participation is made. This last step consists of generating a high, medium, or low value, which has a final influence on the high, medium or low chance of participation.

Baert, De Rick and Van Valckenborgh (2006) constructed a model based on their study of ways to promote a *positive learning climate*. The authors recognise the fact that participation in adult education is a matter of a complex interplay between factors at the different levels: individual level, level of educational institutions and the broader social context. The decision-making process itself originates from a need for change or improvement experienced by the individual in one or more areas of his life, which can be transformed into a specific educational need. After formulating an educational need, the individual must shape an intention to participate in order to demand education. This demand can result in effective participation. The intention is further generated by the attitude of potential learning and the balancing of costs and benefits, by the perception of values and norms, by the person's own characteristics, and finally by the subjective norm containing the perception of the opinions of relevant others. Within this process, factors on different levels can influence the decisions. Socio-demographic characteristics, psychological characteristics, characteristics of the living conditions, and the characteristics relating to the history, biography, capacity, and expectancy of learning and education are influencing factors on the individual level. Factors at the level of the educational institutions include the characteristics of the learning activities, such as

didactical methods, the content of the study programme, the structural and organisational context, and the cultural context factors (such as the use of language or the multi-culturality of the people involved). The model shows that factors on both the individual and the institutional levels are embedded within the broader societal context.

5. Evaluation of the participation models presented

After an evaluation of the models revealing the factors at three different levels (individual, educational institutions, countries), as discussed above, we have concluded that current theoretical modelling efforts are focused mainly on the individual side of lifelong learning. Socio-economic, cultural, and psychological factors with respect to a given individual are present within all the models.

References to factors relating to the educational facilities are available in only half of the models, often in a summary form. Reflection on the role of the government is lacking in nearly all the models. A summary of these findings is summarized in table 2.

TABLE 2

The existing models can be located within the theoretical school of socio-psychological interactionism (Manninen, 2005). In addition to the sociological factors referring to the external part of the decision and the psychological factors referring to the internal part of this process, we noted a clear integration or interaction between these two factorial levels. The models show similar theoretical backgrounds, namely Lewin's field theory (as cited in Smith, 2001). Lewin held that individual behaviour is determined by the social environment and the overall situation in which the individual behaves, a view which is also present within the models described above. Despite the attempt to integrate different angles, most models remain one-sided, with emphasis on the individual. Far too much of the adult education theory is focusing on the individual, resulting in the risk to blaim individuals

for not participating (Ahl, 2006). The cognitive psychological approaches as used in a lot of these models start from the individual perceptions of adults as the most important determinants of participation, structural components are pushed into the background (Silva, Cahalan, Lacireno-Paquet, 1998). Environmental factors are often described only in relation to the individual's life situation, including the perception of keeping control over one's own life. The factors of the educational institutions, such as those described in our level of educational institutions, appear less often, and the factors on the broader country-level are mostly absent. In fact, the word 'perception' is a key element in all these models as the decision to participate is more influenced by how people perceive the reality, than the reality itself (Manninen, 2005, Baert, et al., 2006). Behaviour is often related to feelings, interpretations and images. A decision to participate in adult education is therefore seen as a personal evaluation of the self and the environment.

In the following section, we will explain our own theoretical model –which is aiming to be a comprehensive model – taking into account the three (individual, educational institution, country) elements of the educational market.

6. The construction of a comprehensive model

While creating our model, we build further on the model of Baert, De Rick and van Valckenborgh (2006). As in the model of Baert et al., our model consists of two blocks of factors, namely, a block with a demand side, and a block with a supply side. Each block is read from the inside to the outside, meaning that the individual and the educational institution are the central elements within these blocks, and the two blocks are connected with an arrow, indicating that the decision to participate and the perception of the learning process are formed by means of an interaction between supply and demand. This arrow can be compared

with the *from need to participation cycle* within the model of Baert et al. The model contains an additional appendix or table featuring a list of all specific factors (see table 3).

FIGURE 2

TABLE 3

The central unit on the demand side is the individual, who is influenced by the socio-economic and cultural factors. Within the same set of personal factors, we also distinguish psychological factors such as motives, barriers, attitudes, confidence and intentions, which were also clearly available in the existing models as described above. Within their daily lives, individuals interact with other persons, who influence their behaviour in various contexts - and thus also in relation to education. These contexts include family, work environment and the reference group of friends, as well as various types of facilities and social services, such as employment services, social welfare services, and educational counsellors or intermediaries. All these groups together are summarized under the heading of *relevant others*. The individuals, together with their personal environments, are embedded in the general social context, which is built on the basis of rules, laws, rights and duties that they must obey.

The core of the supply side is the educational institution itself, characterised by a series of organisational factors relating to the institution as a whole, such as the number of staff, accessibility, the quality system, the level of development of the support services and the extent to which it attracts marginalised groups. In addition, the educational institution includes a set of factors relating to the specific programmes, such as the composition of class groups, the didactical methods and the admission requirements. These factors are also present in the work of Schuetze and Slowey (2002) who state that we are shifting from a traditional mode of education into a lifelong learning mode. Granting exemptions, installing distance education and applying differentiation within the classroom are therefore examples of

lowering institutional barriers and striving to more flexibility, based on the needs of the individual learners.

The design and overall organisation of an educational programme can be viewed in relation to the prevailing education policy and the existence of alternative and/or competing programmes, as well as in partnerships with the others such as donors, employment services, and social services, which can help shape the entire function of the educational institution. Finally, we put the educational institution, together with the relevant others, into a social context where all other policy areas of interest are located. Within this broader context, we include areas such as the labour market system and welfare policy. European policy documents on lifelong learning clearly define adult education as a catalyst that increases human capital and as a mechanism to combat social exclusion. It is not only the aim of the European policy to enrol adults in education, but to achieve social and economic outcomes as well (Schleiter, 2009). Effects can be seen both at the level of the country and the individual. An example of a social individual benefit is obtaining a better health situation. An example of a collective monetary and economic outcome is a reduce in unemployment within the country. More social cohesion and trust in the legal system are benefits at a collective non-monetary level. Given these examples, it is straightforward to conclude that other policy domains, such as health and labour market policy, will also have their impact on lifelong learning and vice versa.

7. Discussion and conclusion

Within European Union policy, participation in lifelong learning is proclaimed as an instrument for achieving stronger economic growth, more competition and greater social cohesion, but the participation rates are not looking very promising in a wide range of countries. Our review of the literature concerning these participation issues shows that

effective participation in lifelong learning consists of an interaction between factors by individuals, the educational institutions, and the broader social context.

The main emphasis of the currently available participation models, however, is on the individual level, and much less attention is being paid to the impact of the educational institutions and the regulating authorities. In response to this gap in the theories related to lifelong learning participation, we have constructed a comprehensive model showing that the decision to participate is established through a successful interaction between the individual and the educational institutions. Of major concern is the fact that both the individual and the educational context are embedded in social structures that influence the characteristics on both sides of the participation model. The aim of the model is thus broadening the scope, integrating variables of different nature and it can be used in a heuristic way for further research. A further empirical testing of broader country-level determinants and the collection of international data and indicators revealing the interactions between the different levels are items that can be of great interest for this entire area of research within the field of lifelong learning.

Furthermore, we would like to refer to the model-based theory, which states that models are built as “conscious attempts at systematization of concepts and relations” (Schumpeter, 1954). Models have an operational character and are meant to describe the already known theory in a compact way (Bertels & Nauta, 1969). Another step within research consists of an empirically based exploration of the model. Within our research on participation processes, we are also interested in exploring this schematically visualised model by means of data gathered by surveys. Within our research, we will use the Eurostat Adult Education Survey which focuses on participation versus non participation, based on a household survey sampling within the European countries and the Lifelong Learning 2010 database gathered within the Sixth Framework Programme of the European Commission.

This latter database contains information on background characteristics and participational motives of 13 000 effective European participants in formal adult education.

Using this methodology, we hope to refine the model on the basis of the empirical results in order to develop it into a model with a predictive value beyond its descriptive and explanatory function.

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