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**Adult Learning and Education for Active Democratic
Citizenship: Policies, Practice and Public Pedagogy for
Immigrants in Veneto, Italy**

A transnational essay by:

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Summary

This is a transnational essay written in preparation for the activities of the Comparative Group 4 of the Adult Education Academy 2022 edition. I explore the theory and practice of adult learning and education for active democratic citizenship (ALEADC) in Italy. Specifically focusing on ALEADC for immigrants in the Veneto Region of Italy, I examine the Citizenship and the Integration of Foreign Immigrants in Veneto (CIVIS) project. Research questions that the essay attempts to answer based on the selected comparative categories, are: What are the main aims, content and competences acquired in formal and non-formal ALEADC programmes for immigrants in Veneto, Italy? How do national or regional adult education and lifelong learn ALE policies support and frame ALEADC for immigrants in Veneto, Italy? How international ALE policies support or frame ALEADC for immigrants in Veneto, Italy? I deployed the theoretical framework of democratic citizenship education for newcomers. Desk analysis and case study approaches were deployed, relying on secondary data from policy documents and empirical reports. Findings indicated that ALEADC for immigrants in Italy focuses on the acquisition of Italian language skills and civic competences necessary for social inclusion and formal integration. The ALEADC relates with several regional, national, and international policies in terms of aims and finance. However, it was concluded that ALEADC in Veneto, Italy lacks elements of critical pedagogy.

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1. Introduction

Adult learning and education (ALE) simultaneously helps people to cause social change and to manage as well as maximise the change around them. Adult learning and education for active democratic citizenship (ALEADC) is one of the ways people learn to deal with change. It potentially empowers individuals and the society, enhances human development as well as national and global socioeconomic and political development. Immigrants constitute a marginal but important group of every community. Italy, my country case is not an exception. Thus, this essay focuses on ALEADC for immigrants in Italy, particularly in the Veneto Region. Although discrepancies and nuances of legal and real citizenship are visible in the context of immigrants obtaining citizenship (status) in the host society, citizenship education at least serves to mitigate issues and challenges that immigrants face, including ‘emotional issues arising from leaving relatives, friends and a known environment to issues related to legal barriers, moving expenses, uncertainty about the future, lack of familiarity with the new culture and language, difficulties in finding decent employment, and in many cases also exploitation, discrimination and racism’ (Schugurensky, 2010 p. 5).

Italy, a peninsula in the heart of the Mediterranean Sea, is a country of 60 million inhabitants in the Southern Europe. Italy is the third largest member state and a key stakeholder within the European Union. The unitary parliamentary republic is divided into 20 Regions. In Italy, ALE is provided by public and private organisations (working strictly with governmental authorities) and the Regions are principally responsible for the ALE field (EAEA, 2011). Countries with history of significant immigration usually have committed citizenship education for immigrants (Schugurensky, 2010). Italy’s recent migration trajectories have informed how ALE aims at inclusion, with economic and social connotation (EAEA, 2011). This essay will provide evidence of how the country is handling ALEADC for immigrants in one of its Regions. Veneto, located in northern Italy is the fourth largest region and the fourth region with the most population of foreign citizens, hosting 509,420 (9.8%) foreigners (Tuttitalia, 2021). Veneto is divided into 6 Provinces (Belluno, Padova, Rovigo, Treviso, Verona, Vicenza) and the Metropolitan City of Venice. The Provinces and the City are further divided into 581 Municipalities. In Italy, the theory and practice of citizenship education is informed by various regional, national, and international frameworks/policies and organisations. ALE is majorly implemented at the Provincial Centres for Education of Adults (CPIA - Centri Provinciali per l’Istruzione degli Adulti) in each Municipality.

1.1 Research Questions

The aim of this essay is to explore the conceptualisations, policies, and practices of ALEADC in Italy, specifically focusing on citizenship education for immigrants in the Veneto region of the country.

- i. What are the main aims, content and competences acquired in formal and non-formal ALEADC programmes for immigrants in Veneto, Italy?
- ii. How do national or regional adult education and lifelong learn ALE policies support and frame ALEADC for immigrants in Veneto, Italy?
- iii. How international ALE policies support or frame ALEADC for immigrants in Veneto, Italy?

Having provided some context information about ALE in Italy and presented the research questions, the rest of the essay is structured into five major sections. Presently, key concepts, ideas and issues are defined under the theoretical framework. I then proceed by defining the methodological approach before presenting the findings relating to formal and non-formal ALEADC programmes for immigrants in the Veneto Region of Italy (Comparative category 1), national and regional policies (Comparative category 2) and international policies that influence the conception and practice of ALEADC in Italy (Comparative category 3). I end with a discussion and conclusion section summarising the theoretical and empirical findings from three categories and possible inferences and implications.

2. Theoretical Framework

While citizenship is often viewed as an interlink of status— ‘primarily concerned with the rights and duties associated with membership of a community’ or/and practice—‘the attitudes and actions that promote active citizenship’ (Johnston, 2005, p. 48). ALEADC is largely conceived as learning about citizenship (preparatory, aligns with citizenship as status) and learning for citizenship (developmental, aligns with citizenship as practice) and learning through citizenship (combining citizenship both as status and practice; the former more leans towards formal approach and the latter towards informal and non-formal approaches) (Johnston, 2005). In the discussion of the four dimensions of learning for citizenship— learning for inclusive, pluralistic, reflexive, and active citizenship—there is a connection between learning for citizenship and marginalised groups (Johnston, 2005). In fact, Schugurensky (2010) emphasises immigrant education as a component of citizenship education with the aim

to *prepare* immigrants for citizenship. This approach often aligns more closely with the concepts of learning about citizenship and learning for inclusive citizenship (Johnston, 2010).

To focus on the pedagogical perspective, this essay further hinges on the framework of democratic citizenship education for newcomers (Wildemeersch, 2017). The framework explains how education practices for building ‘responsible citizenship’ among newly arrived migrants, advocating ALEADC that transcends the sphere of the uncritical state control model to the realm of critical educational engagement that is Other-centric. The framework defines three concepts of responsible citizenship and connects them with Biesta’s three approaches to public pedagogy. *Citizenship-as-status* aligns with pedagogy *for* the public, whereby ALEADC for immigrants deploys a deficit approach and aims at instructing immigrants to become ‘good citizens’ by behaviouristically adapting to the culture and expectations of the host community. *Citizenship-as-identity* corresponds to pedagogy *of* the public whereby dialogue and consensus strategies are used to avoid sociocultural conflicts and/or manage diversity. This approach is susceptible to a dialogue dominated by one-sidedness and hegemonies of the host culture. The last approach, *pedagogy for publicness* (of pedagogy-of-interruption) is for *citizenship-as-activity* with the aim of developing people as public actors. It allows dissensus and interruption within the spheres of immigrant citizenship education thereby ‘opening spaces for conversation’, creating ‘opportunities for unique individuals to articulate difference, rather than to accommodate to a pre-given identity’ and “cautiously and attentively articulate their ‘concerns for the Other’” (Wildemeersch, 2017, p. 125).

This framework is suitable for this transnational essay for several reasons. One, while it admits, like Johnston (2005) and Schugurensky (2010) the inevitability of a continuum of the various types/dimensions of citizenship, it also emphasises the contrast/clash between the host society and ‘the Other’ immigrant community and how such contrast shapes pedagogical interactions between the two groups. Two, the framework encourages the use of ALEADC in critical form and for emancipatory purpose rather than being limited by the dictates of political and economic capitalist/neoliberalist hegemonies. Three, although Wildemeersch’s theoretical proposal is mostly based on empirical examples of phenomena and encounters relating to asylum seekers, the foundational depth of the framework makes it possible to extend its application from ‘newcomers’ and ‘immigrants’ in general.

3. Methodology

Desk analysis and case study approaches were deployed for this essay. Theoretical data were principally derived from policy documents of the Veneto Region, Italy, European Union

(EU) and the United Nations (UN). The case study approach was adopted by focusing how the legislation and provision of ALEADC for immigrants in Veneto and more specifically spotlighting on the CIVIS project. To analyse the case project, I rely on information on several websites about the project and empirical data from reports of studies carried by Veneto Lavoro (2012) and CPIA Verona (2021).

4. Comparative Category 1: Formal and Non-formal Programmes

ALEADC for immigrants in Veneto, Italy includes formal and non-formal programmes provided by CPIAs and associated organisations. CPIAs are very instrumental to the governmental provision of ALEADC, and ALE in general. CPIA were created by the Ministerial Decree of 25th October 2007 and they became operational in 2009 (as a reformation of Permanent Territorial Centres [CTPs] established in 1997). CPIA has learning places distributed across Municipalities (Commune) in Provinces under each Region. Veneto, through the office of the Regional Council for Immigration, has implemented many immigrant education projects, including in MOOC format.

4.1 Aims and Competences

ALEADC aims to promote activities of Italian language literacy and knowledge as well as civic education for non-EU citizens legally residing in Veneto with a view to raising their education levels and enhancing their skills towards full linguistic and social integration (Veneto Region, 2011). The aims of ALEADC for immigrants in Italy are to: (a) facilitate the development of language skills among immigrants (especially third-country nationals) for the acquisition of an A2 level proficiency in the Italian language innovative modules, contents, and methodologies and (b) facilitate civic training of immigrants (especially third-country nationals) for a proficient knowledge of civic culture and civil life in Italy (Veneto Lavoro, 2012; CPIA Verona, 2021). ALEADC in Veneto helps immigrants develop various competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes) bordering on the following topics (Veneto Lavoro, 2012):

1. Safety in the workplace
2. Italian language as L2 (speaking, listening, reading and writing)
3. Orientation aimed at job placement
4. Professional Qualification
5. Basic IT
6. Italian civics
7. Italian and/or Venetian culture

8. Orientation aimed at social inclusion
9. Intercultural mediation
10. Entrepreneurship
11. Financial Education
12. Parenting Skills

4.2 A Case Project – Citizenship and Integration of Foreign Immigrants in Veneto (CIVIS)

Citizenship and Integration of Foreign Immigrants in Veneto (CIVIS - Cittadinanza e Integrazione in Veneto degli Immigrati Stranieri) is one of the Region's many projects. The project was implemented through CPIA in collaboration with other partners in the education and labour sectors. CIVIS started in 2011 and has since been implemented in five editions. The project was initially financed under the European Fund for the Integration of Third Countries Nationals (FEI – Fondo Europeo per l'Integrazione) and recently (CIVIS V) under the European Fund for Asylum, Integration, Return (FAMI – Fondo Europeo per l'Asilo, l'Integrazione, il Rientro). For the Veneto Region, the effective and responsible integration of immigrant citizens into the social fibre is paramount. Therefore, the aim of CIVIS project is to facilitate the integration of immigrants (especially non-EU foreigners) through the pathway of language and civic education.

CIVIS Italian language and civic education courses are offered for *free* for immigrants from non-EU countries. The courses are consistent with the requirements of the procedure for acquiring a long-term residence permit (*carta di soggiorno*) in line with the Ministerial Decree of 4 June 2010 and the Presidential Decree 179/2011, and the Consolidated Act on Immigration Legislative Decree 286/1998. Proficiency in Italian language (L2) A2 level in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a fundamental for integration. The implication is that the courses are mandatory for immigrants that want to be officially integrated into the community. CIVIS initiatives have been objects of empirical research with a view to discovering dynamics of integration and social participation of immigrants. Since its inception in 2011, five research reports have been produced on different editions of CIVIS. Two of the research reports are especially relevant to the scope of this essay: one, *Training to Integrate: Training and Foreign Citizens in Veneto* (Veneto Lavoro, 2012), which evaluates the first edition of the project (CIVIS I) and *Language, Culture, Integration in the Social and Cultural Processes that Support the Exercise of Citizenship of Immigrants* (CPIA Verona, 2021), which focuses on CIVIS V.

4.2.1 CIVIS Study 1 – Veneto Lavoro (2012)

The study attempts to determine the link between training and integration pathways. The first part is an analysis of the training offers for foreigners in Veneto from the perspective of 162 organisations (offering identify more than 8,800 courses of training courses in Italian language and civics in 2011). On average, 88% of organisations that have carried out at least one specific training activity for foreigners are financed by public funds. Mapped training activities aimed exclusively at foreigners carried out by 62 organisations in 2011 of which 73% related to the teaching of the Italian language. There were 11,393 (42% women) foreign users that participated. Only about one fourth of the institutions developed at least one innovative course each year, the remaining three quarters quarter replicate annually the interventions of the past. The second part analyses the training demand of foreigners in Veneto from the perspective of the 774 immigrants that were attending an Italian L2 course during April and May 2012. For both males and females, the most frequent reason was represented by the desire to better integrate in Italy (48.7%). The need to obtain a residence permit was a motivation shared by 37.4% of the respondents, while 35.5% (273) stated that they had decided to attend the Italian course to acquire language skills useful to find a job or to increase their professionalism. The training methodology most appreciated by foreign users is frontal teaching in the classroom with a group of students: this method is appreciated by 85% of the respondents. On topics preserved by the immigrants, 45% of the respondents would attend a training course aimed at acquiring skills useful for job hunting, 42% are interested in gaining a better understanding of the host culture and society.

4.2.2 CIVIS Study 2 – CPIA Verona (2021)

This study evaluates the impact of the mandatory nature language and culture in the context of integration and citizenship of immigrants. It covers the CIVIS programmes that were implemented between 2014 and 2020 and sought to determine if and to what extent knowledge of Italian and civic culture act as tools for the exercise of active citizenship among immigrants. Verona, the study area of the research, is one of the Provinces in the Region of Veneto. The research report contains analysis of data generated from four different groups of participants: three groups of adult immigrant learners and a group of operators/facilitators of integration procedures. In the first group, regarding the motivations for learning: 44% declared that they considered Italian to be useful first from a work point of view (occupational domain), followed by 23% who see the importance of the L2 to better understand the host society (public domain). In the second group, 92% of those interviewed (mostly women) declared that they were in Italy

for family reasons and had the intention to stay for long periods (57%) or to settle permanently (28%).

The third sub-study, regarding the level of perception that participants have of their knowledge of the Italian language the average score on perceived skills is 2.77 (out of 4) and the average score for attitudes is 3.4 (out of 4). The fourth analysis stems from the focus group discussion with the operators involved in the procedures identified by the provisions for the application of the regulations, such as officials of the Prefecture and the Police Headquarters, teachers of the CPIA, operators of patronages and representatives of the third sector, which contributes to support through information and reception services. On the reflexive perception of institutional actors on their experiences and duties working with immigrants, there was a heterogeneity of responses, consistent with the professional roles and institutional mandate held by the participants. Images related to include family, shoes, open prisons, prisons bars, hospital, etc. It was founded that the representation of the CPIA is both supportive and controlling roles. Not only was there always a lack of knowledge, but there was also sometimes incomplete information. While everyone recognised the usefulness of the obligation to have a minimum knowledge of Italian as a vehicle for integration, civic education was not as well recognised as such.

5. Comparative category 2: National and Regional Policies

Various national legislative instruments in forms of circulars, laws and decrees have informed the practice of ALE in Italy, including Ministerial Circulars 7809/1990 and 305/1997, the Ordinance of the Ministry of Public Education 455/1997, Unified Conference of 2nd March 2000, the Ministerial Directive 22/2001, the Ministerial Circular 26/2006, the Law 53/2003 (53/2003 Act), and the Ministerial Decree of 25th October 2007. Presidential Decree no. 179 of 14th September 2011 stipulates that immigrant over the age of 16 who enters Italy for the first time after 10th March 2012 and apply for a long-stay residence permit must sign an agreement with the Italian State, known as the 'Integration Agreement'. Through the Agreement, immigrants undertake to learn the Italian language and the rules of civil coexistence in force in Italy.

Focusing on the Veneto Region, the principal legislative instrument that on immigrants is the Regional Law of 30th January 1990, n. 9 (BUR n. 8/1990) (Interventions in the Immigration Sector). There are other Venetian legislations relevant to ALEADC in one way of the other, including Regional Law of March 31 2017, n. 9 (BUR no. 35/2017) (The educational system of the Veneto Region), Regional Law of June 21 2018, n. 21 (BUR n. 62/2018)

(Regional interventions for the promotion and dissemination of human rights as well as cooperation for sustainable development), and Regional Interventions for the Promotion of the pro-European culture. This list shows that Veneto is rich in policies for ALEADC. This richness stems, in part, from the jurisdiction that the Republic's confers on the Regions of Italy. Whereas the State (National Government) is exclusively responsible for immigration issues such as visa matters and legal status of immigrants, the regions can make laws that concerning education, social and health services for immigrants. Specifically, Article 3 section 5 of the Consolidated Immigration Act (Legislative Decree 286 of 25th July 1998) of Italy saddles the Regions with the responsibility of facilitating social interactions and integration of immigrants.

The regional principal policy, the *Interventions in the Immigration Sector* (BUR n. 8/1990, hereinafter referred to as 'Interventions Law 1990'), provides for the integration of non-EU citizens residing in Veneto and facilitating the dialogue with the local community. The law states that the Region's immigrant-related initiatives must be 'maintaining the language and the cultural identity' of the territory (Art. 1, Para. 1, Interventions Law 1990). The Interventions Law does *not* refer the implementation of specific courses for learning the Italian language integrated with elements of civic education' (Art 2. Para. 3b, Interventions Law 1990). Also, the 'interventions' were *not* 'the implementation or sponsorship of initiatives aimed at promoting and raising awareness of the cultures of immigrant communities among the citizens of the Veneto, maintaining the cultural identity of each country of origin and developing encounters between different cultures' (Art 2. Para. 3f, Interventions Law 1990). However, the law creates the Regional Council that is empowered to plan and budget for various integration initiatives. It also provides guidelines for a rich collaboration between the regional government and non-EU immigrant associations by working together through the Regional Council.

6. Comparative Category 3: International Policies

At continental and global levels, there are several policies that covertly or overtly affect ALEADC in Italy. According to the foreword by Edith Cresson to the EU's report on *Education and Active Citizenship in the European Union* (EU, 1998),

'Citizenship with a European dimension is anchored in the shared creation of a voluntary community of peoples, of different cultures and of different traditions - the creation of a democratic society which has learned to embrace diversity sincerely as a positive opportunity, a society of openness and solidarity for each and every one of us.' (p.3-4).

Despite the nobility of this aim, it is directed towards the complimentary citizenship of Europeans in their Nations and in the Union. As at 1998, the focus was on building social interactions and lifelong learning approach for ADC among nationals of the EU Member States. However, the report-policy acknowledges the increasing internationalisation in Italy because of the shift it was experiencing from ‘cultures of emigration to cultures of immigration’ setting the stage in a changing Europe for ‘breaking down ethnocentrism and discrimination whilst encouraging tolerance and diversity as core elements of the European dimension of citizenship’ (EU, 1998, p. 21).

In *A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (Commission of the European Communities, 2000), “promoting active citizenship and promoting employability are equally important and interrelated aims for lifelong learning’ (p. 4). The Priority Area 3 in *Council Resolution on a Renewed Agenda for Adult Learning* and (EU Council, 2011) is ‘promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship through adult learning’. In the latest version of the Agenda, *Council Resolution on a New European Agenda for Adult Learning 2021-2030* (EU Council, 2021), EU reaffirms that ‘adult learning can contribute to active citizenship and community learning’ (p. 8). Under the Priority Area 4, the Council recognises the importance of fostering solidarity ‘between cultures and people from all backgrounds and for fostering democratic citizenship’ (p. 21).

At the global level, in the agenda declared in *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations, 2015), ‘we recognize the positive contribution of migrants for inclusive growth and sustainable development’ (para. 29, p. 11). Target 4.7 of the 2030 Agenda/SDG is to ‘ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development’ including through global citizenship education. The dimension of global citizenship is rooted in the ideal that ‘all cultures and civilizations can contribute to, and are crucial enablers of, sustainable development’ (ibid, para 36). One of the major inter-governmental organisations that influence the practice of ALE is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Staying through to its worldwide mandate, UNESCO (2015) develops a conceptual and practical/pedagogical guidance for *Global Citizenship Education*. UNESCO defines Global citizenship as ‘a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity. It emphasises political, economic, social and cultural interdependency and interconnectedness between the local, the national and the global’ (p. 14). Global citizenship education ‘aims to be transformative, building the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that

learners need to be able to contribute to a more inclusive, just and peaceful world' (UNESCO, 2015, p. 15).

7. Discussion and Conclusion

Veneto's ALEADC through CIVIS is commendable for its accessibility, financially and geographically, in line with the European Agenda for Integration. The project is deployed for effective integration of third-country nationals to maximise the benefits of migration practices and the development of a competitive and cohesive society. CIVIS empowers immigrants to overcome some difficulties relating to their status and condition. Proficiency in Italian is the basis of the empowerment. Thus, language courses are central in Veneto's ALEADC for immigrants because they are seen as a tool of social dialogue and prevention of conflicts. Also, the CIVIS aligns with the aims of a plethora of national, European, and global policies. European policies and projects in Veneto border on social inclusion, the promotion of immigrant associations, work orientation and support, governance strengthening, language and civic training, and for analyzing and overcoming stereotypes and discrimination. Perhaps one of the strategies that ensures the influence of EU policies on the Veneto Region and Italy as a nation is the EU's financial support. The case project CIVIS is a successful example, financed under the FEI and the FAMI frameworks. Thus, the CIVIS project is in line with the dictates of the Stockholm Programme, adopted by the European Council on 10 and 11 December 2009, which assigns the European Commission the task of supporting the efforts made by the Member States in the field of integration of immigrants.

However, the ALEADC strategy used in Veneto, Italy, though it aims at integration, tends toward 'forced assimilation' because it aims at helping the immigrants 'adopt the language, traditions, attitudes and values of the dominant culture as fast as possible' (Schugurensky, 2010, p. 6). This is probably due to the theoretical and scholastic tensions occasioned by the economicist ideologies and the humanistic perspectives in adult education which affect the conception and practice of citizenship education that aims at integrating immigrants (Wildemeersch, 2017). The integration model is supposed to balance the burden of inclusion responsibility between the members of the host society and the immigrants, where both groups almost equally adapt their perceptions, realities, and competences to have a more inclusive community. It can be concluded CIVIS tends to cover the first level of ALEADC public pedagogy (pedagogy for public) and attempts to provide the second level (pedagogy of the public). To the extent to which the analysis in this paper covers, there are no indications that the project has any allowance for the third level (pedagogy for publicness). As evident in

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>

Veneto Lavoro (Ed.) (2012). *Formarsi per Integrarsi: Formazione e Cittadini Stranieri in Veneto – Mappatura dell’Offerta Formativa Linguistico-civica e Analisi dei Fabbisogni dell’Utenza Straniera* [Training for Integration: Training and Foreign Citizens in Veneto – Mapping of the Linguistic-civic Training Offer of the Territory and Analysis of the Needs of Foreign Users]. <http://www.venetoimmigrazione.it/en/civis-research>

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