

“We Are Not a Small Island, We Are the Ocean”. Becoming a Student in Mature Age. An Exploratory Analysis on Italy and Spain

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Abstract

The complexity underlying motivations and obstacles encountered by Mature Adults (MA; people over 45 years old) in their participation in educational activities, requires a thorough analysis to determine which factors are most salient for this social group. Under the project funded by the European Commission "IMAL: Innovations in Mature Adult Learning", a study through a questionnaire ($n = 1.066$) was conducted. From that sample, data for two of the participating countries, Spain ($n_s = 106$) and Italy ($n_i = 460$), have been drawn. The aim of the paper is to make an exploratory analysis of both samples in order to determine the most important motivational factors for MA in their educational participation, through descriptive and bivariate analysis (independent sample test), and to test how the sociodemographic variables influence these factors by an analysis through logistic regression. The results show great similarities between both samples. Lower levels of education and not being in working condition were found as risk factors for not undertaking learning activities. In both samples, the weight of “internal” motivations is very relevant. This evidence leads to interpret MA learning as a process addressed towards personal enrichment, thus claiming for a more holistic and learner centered vision in adult education.

Keywords: mature adults, lifelong learning, education, motivation, lifewide learning.

“No Somos una Pequeña Isla, Somos el Océano”. Convertirse en Estudiante en la Edad Madura. Un Análisis Exploratorio en Italia y España

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Resumen

La complejidad que subyace en las motivaciones y obstáculos que encuentran los Adultos Maduros (AM; mayores de 45) en su participación en actividades educativas hace necesario un análisis en profundidad que determine qué factores son los más salientes para este grupo poblacional. En el marco del proyecto financiado por la Comisión Europea “IMAL: Innovations in Mature Adult Learning”, se llevó a cabo un estudio a través de un cuestionario ($n=1.066$), del cual se han extraído datos para dos de los países participantes, España ($n_s=106$) e Italia ($n_i=460$). El objetivo de este trabajo es realizar un análisis exploratorio de ambas muestras con el fin de determinar los factores motivacionales más importantes para los AM en su participación en la educación, mediante un análisis descriptivo y bivariante (test de muestras independientes), y probar si las variables sociodemográficas influyen en estos factores mediante regresión logística. Los resultados muestran grandes similitudes entre ambas muestras. Un bajo nivel educativo y no estar trabajando aparecen como factores de riesgo para no emprender actividades educativas. En ambas muestras el peso de las motivaciones "internas" es muy relevante. Ello lleva a interpretar el aprendizaje de los AM como un proceso dirigido hacia el enriquecimiento personal, reclamando así una visión más holística y centrada en el alumno.

Palabras clave: adultos maduros, aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida, educación, motivación, aprendizaje a lo ancho de la vida.

“We are not a small island, we are the ocean”. That was one of the many comments that the article “Qué es y qué no es la formación de personas adultas en 8 ideas” [*What is and what is not adult education in 8 ideas*] on the blog “De vuelta” [*Being back*] (Paraíso, 2016), which provoked enthusiasm among the readers (educators and adult learners). In this article, the author, Ramón Paraíso, defended adult education as a stage not separated from other periods in a person’s life, its complexity, its potentiality for implementing innovative methods and its great diversity. Ideas that are very distant from the common understanding of society and institutions, as the author claims, focusing especially on mature adults’ education.

In recent years the phenomenon of an aging population in Europe has led institutions to promote the participation of Mature Adults (over 45 years of age, following Crawford, 2004; hereinafter MA) in learning activities as a way to improve and update their education, so to remain an attractive segment of labour supply for employers (Swain, 1995; Marcaletti, 2012) and to encourage their active participation in society (Antikainen et al., 2006; Mayo, 2009). These facts have become a priority for the European Union (European Commission, 2012) in order to find strategies for getting a more inclusive education in which MA can participate. In accordance with this purpose, the project “IMAL: Innovations in Mature Adult Learning” (Jancewicz et al., 2015), funded by Grundtvig LLP (European Commission), was developed between 2013 and 2015 in Denmark, Spain, Greece, Italy, Poland and Turkey. Its main objective was to analyse the participation of MA in educational activities and their motivations to learn, in Europe in general, and, particularly, in each one of the participating countries.

Starting from the project results, we revised the literature on Adult Learning (AL) and MA education, and we extracted the data about Italy and Spain so to implement for both countries analysis focusing on a) the characteristics and impact of MA’s participation in educational activities; b) the key motivational factors that lead to MA to participate in education; c) the obstacles that this segment of the population perceives when they want to be involved in training activities; and d) the sociodemographic features that can influence the factors that encourage or discourage MA from participating in education. The selection of these two countries have been determined because of the similarities in their contexts and macro-factors,

like the way of organizing LLL, and with a MA participation in education aligned with the European average.

Results show that Mature Adult Learning (MAL) is a complex phenomenon that involves many individuals' "external" and "internal" factors that can lead MA to participate in education or obstruct it. Taking into account the limitations of the sampling biases, for both countries, the weight of internal motivations results greater than what the traditional education theories on MA defend, although in Italy the usability of the acquired knowledge at work is also an important factor. About obstacles, in Spain they are more related to personal situation (such as a lack of time), while in Italy the educational offering (cost and usability) seems not to be tailored to MA needs. Sociodemographic features can predict the reasons for undertaking or not educational activities in both countries. For younger and employed MA, the usability of learning is a more relevant point than to other groups, while being a woman can determine the relevance given to the empowerment "as a person" that education can give. Furthermore, we found that conditions such as "not being at work", and "having a lower educational attainment", can predict the importance of internal elements related to lack of confidence of MA as students.

We conclude that the multidimensionality of MAL claims for an approach which overcomes exclusionary theories that assume utilitarianism of learning as the main motivational factor, and "age-related motivation decline" as the principal obstacle, opting for a more holistic view in which MAL can be seen in an integrated way.

Mature Adults and Motivations for Learning. From the Utilitarianism to the Holistic Approach

Lifelong Learning (LLL) can be defined as the voluntary and self-motivated search for knowledge either for personal or professional reasons (Skolverket, 2000), including both formal and non-formal education (UNESCO, 1976). This not only enhances social inclusion, active citizenship, and personal development, but also self-sustainability, competitiveness, and employability (Chao, 2009; Swain, 1995; Marcaletti, 2012). According to this meaning, the international scientific community understands AL as a particular segment of learning (Clark & Caffarella, 1999), with its own system of teaching and

learning, not based on pedagogy but on *andragogy* (Knowles, 1980). According to *andragogy*, the student is much more independent and learns what he/she needs to apply into his/her life (Knowles, 1968), normally at work. In that sense, AL “external” motivations have been studied in-depth by the scientific community. Social promotion, vocational adjustment, or specific problem solving solutions at work or in other places, are factors that can encourage adults to find in education a way to solve personally a structural problem (Rujas Martínez-Novillo, 2015; Pac et al., 2013). Regarding “internal” factors, they are more difficult to measure because they connect emotional dimensions such as self-esteem, satisfaction, personal safety or personal tuning to adjust to social changes (Ryan et al., 1985, Pérez-Serrano, 2001; González & Maeso, 2005), so their analysis remains still incipient.

In MA the utilitarian approach is also prominent (Houle, 1974; Oliveira, 2013; Gorges & Kandler, 2012; Hubackova & Semradova, 2014). According to it, MA age is in the core of the debate about motivation, with authors positioning themselves according to two different streams (Gengenfurten & Vauras, 2012): *Age-related motivation decline theories* (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004) and *Age-related motivation maintenance theories* (Stipek, 1996; De Corte, 2003).

The *Age-related motivation decline theories* explain the age factor as an important barrier for MA for accessing educational activities (Van Vianen, 1997; Chao, 2009; González & Maeso, 2005), due to structural elements (Pac et al., 2013; Rujas Martínez-Novillo, 2015), and/or internal obstacles (Ryan et al., 1985, Pérez-Serrano, 2001; González & Maeso, 2005). In the first case, external or structural obstacles can arise from pre-existing barriers to MA’s access to certain educational activities, such as ageism in educational institutions or within work organisations, leading to the conclusion that the capacity to learn and the usefulness of the learnings decrease with age (Van Vianen, 1997). Furthermore, MA can be put in the condition to assume those prejudices as their own internal barriers, considering themselves too old to learn (Chao, 2009). Thus, these internal factors such as insecurity, lack of self-esteem, or closure to challenges can also limit the access of MA to education (González & Maeso, 2005).

However, and aligned with the *Age-related motivation maintenance theories*, this utilitarian approach has been overcome in recent years in favour of a more holistic and integrated concept of adult learning. Some

authors defend the idea that education is not separated from life (Desjardins, 2004; Reder, 2009), it doesn't only take place in a classroom as something needed only for being applied; on the contrary, educational experiences are complex processes that can occur everywhere, not only for practical purposes, but also for the pleasure of learning itself, and for personal enrichment (Pring, 1999).

This innovative approach promotes a new conception of education (UNESCO, 2010) which states that the differentiation between pedagogy and andragogy is senseless (Gorges & Kandler, 2012). Some authors argue that people don't transform into adult learners: their needs and motivations to learn remain the same (Norman, 1999), and the limits between ages are more fluid (UNESCO, 2010). Therefore, education must be understood also as an unlimited process in duration and according to the topics covered. That's why is possible to talk about not only LLL but also Lifewide Learning (LWL) (UNESCO, 2010; Reischmann, 2014). LWL is defined as the entire body of ongoing learning processes, formal or otherwise, within which people develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical qualifications, or turn them towards a new direction in order to meet their own needs and those of their society. LWL is a self-directed and compositional learning (learners bring different learning resources together during the learning experience) and a lifewide here-and-now learning that comes "through life", and not through intended learning/teaching situations (Reischmann, 2014).

If learning is so wide and diverse, so are the learners. MA learners are not only a huge heterogeneous group according to educational levels, origins, cultural background, health conditions, working status, etc. (UNESCO, 2010); their motivations for learning can cover a large multiplicity of motivational factors (UNESCO, 2010; Desjardins, 2004; Reder, 2009; Pring, 1999; Iñiguez Berrozpe & Marcaletti, 2016; Pérez-Serrano, 2001; Houle, 1974). This multidimensionality of MAL can't be approached in a sectorial way (Faure et al., 1972; Delors et al., 1996; Sen, 1999), but in spite of that, the educational offer is not completely tailored to this holistic approach and still remains excessively compartmented (UNESCO, 2010), not taking into account that AL in general and MA learning in particular is an integrated process.

In our study we started from the idea that an in-depth research on MAL, which takes into account both individuals' internal and external motivation

and obstacles, will contribute to a better understanding of this complex phenomenon, in the perspective of the educational offer that would become more holistic and human-centred (Faure et al., 1972; Delors et al., 1996; Sen, 1999), overcoming the economic and utilitarian approach to learning of past decades. The consequences of assuming MAL as a more integrated learner-centred process, can flow towards a better integration of MA into the labour market and into the other social spheres (UNESCO, 2010; López & Sarrate, 2005; Pac et al., 2013), but also promoting a better social cohesion and equality (Green, 2011; Freire, 1970; 1996), a political, social and personal empowering (Antikainen et al., 2006; Mayo, 2009; Freire, 1970; 1996), better health (López, Navarro & Requena, 2015), and even becoming an educational referent for other social agents (e.g. family), breaking the circle of exclusion of some weak groups (e.g. migrants, ethnic minorities, etc.) (Valero, Elboj & Iñiguez 2015).

Mature Adults' Participation in Education in Italy and Spain

AL in Italy and Spain

According to European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training reports on Lifelong Learning for Italy and Spain (Cedefop 2002a; 2002b),¹ we can find many similarities in the organization of Adult Education in the two countries. The aim of Lifelong Learning is based both in Italy and Spain on the idea of enabling adults to acquire basic education; improving professional options through qualifications or acquiring skills needed to start new jobs; but also other capacities not related to work, like developing personal skills in communicative, expressive, and interpersonal relations, or even as a right of democratic citizenship. All these objectives are set with the ultimate goal of reducing adults' social exclusion by developing specific programmes and promoting effective equality of rights and opportunities between men and women.

Specifically, in Italy an agreement between the government, regions, provinces and mountain communities reorganised and empowered lifelong learning and adult education (Conferenza Unificata del 2 marzo 2000), reinforcing previous legislative acts and agreements – like the two Circolari Ministeriali 7809/1990 and 305/1997, or the Ordinanza del Ministero della

Publica Istruzione 455/1997 – that improved the right to education and vocational training. About the educational offering, Permanent Territorial Centres (CPT) and “evening schools” are the main public structures that are focused on the promotion of adult education. Also private companies, organisations related to public authorities, and many NGOs operate on the territory to provide adult education courses.

Adult education in Spain is regulated by the General Educational Act (LOE - Ley Orgánica de Educación, 2006). It recognises the relevance of LLL as a means towards social development and provides the legal basis for adult education in Spain. Nonetheless, due to the decentralisation, adult education policies are managed by each autonomous community independently. Formal education is promoted in public intuitions for AL like universities, vocational training institutes, and e-learning directly provided by the Ministry of Education, Social Policies and Sport, via the Innovation and Development Centre for Distance Learning. Non-formal education is also wide spread in Popular Universities, Training Centres for Adult People, NGOs, etc.

Facts and Figures

To analyse the participation of MA in education we focussed on the Education and Training Statistics (Eurostat, 2015), and the Adult Education Survey (AES, Eurostat, 2007; 2011), which is part of the EU Statistics on lifelong learning, and whose target population is composed of people aged 25 to 64.

Figures on adult participation in activities of formal and non-formal education show that there is a significant decrease according to age increase, and that the degree of participation is particularly low in the eldest age group analysed (55-64). As it is shown in Figure 1, comparatively, the Spanish case is aligned with the European trend until the age group 45-54 years old, where the European percentage starts to be 2 points higher than the Spanish. About Italian figures, adults’ participation in education is lower than the Spanish and European percentages within all age groups up to the older MA (55-64 years old), age class in which the differences between the two countries disappear, and they positioned at the same level (around 4%).

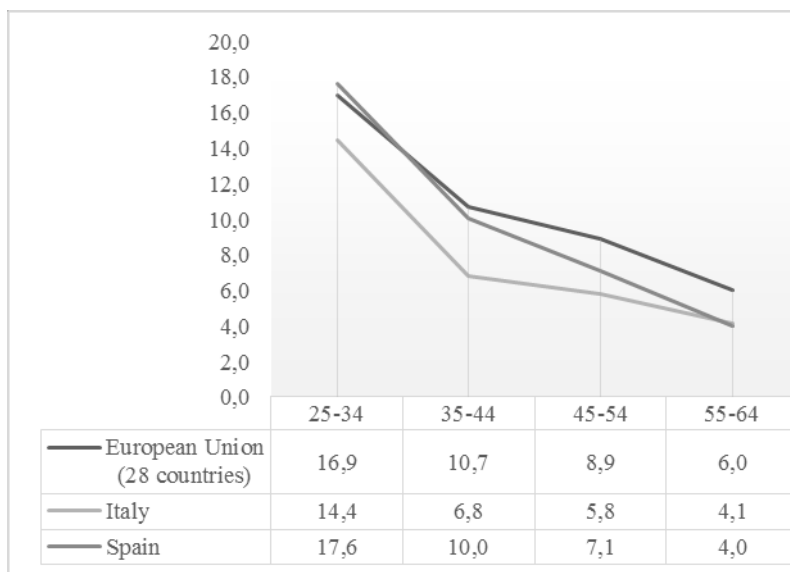


Figure 1

Participation in educational activities of population over 25 years old in Italy, Spain and EU countries (2015)

Source: EUROSTAT (2015). Own processing.

Both in Italy and Spain the evolution of the participation in education of people aged 45-54 years old has been positive in the last 10 years, as Figure 2 evidences. The Spanish percentage has run parallel to the European average, even surpassing it in the period 2006-2012, although in the last three years the participation has suffered a decrease of more than one percentage point. Regarding Italy, despite this index is much lower than the European and Spanish ones, the evolution has been more fluctuating, but positive especially in 2014.

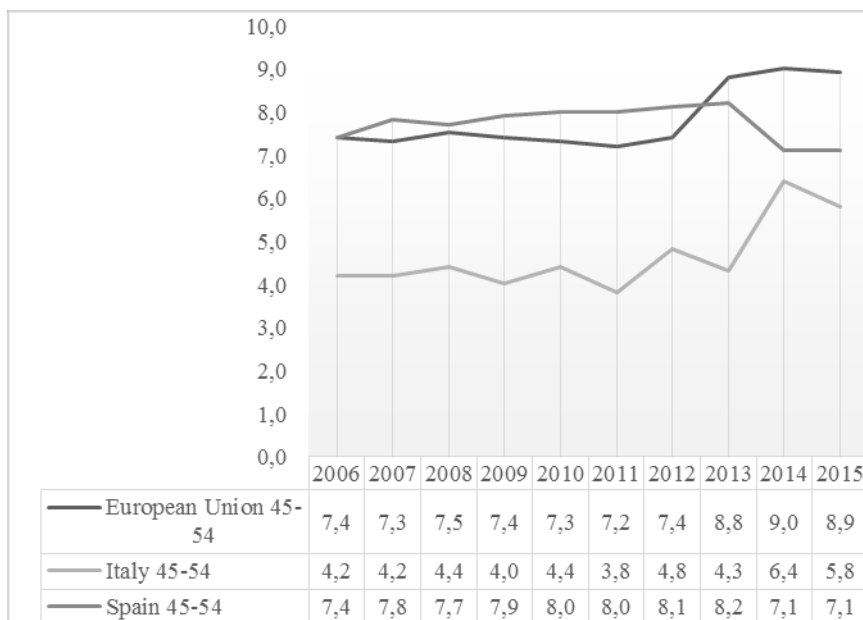


Figure 2

Evolution of the participation in Education of MA (45-54) in Italy, Spain and EU countries (2006-2015)

Source: EUROSTAT (2015). Own processing.

Regarding 55-64 age group, as shown in Figure 3, the evolution of the participation in education has been similar to the younger one, with Spain even overcoming the European mean until 2012, reaching its maximum in 2013 (5,3%), but then decreasing more than one percentage point in the last two years. Italy shows again a lower participation, but evolving positively up to overcoming Spain in 2014 (4,5%).

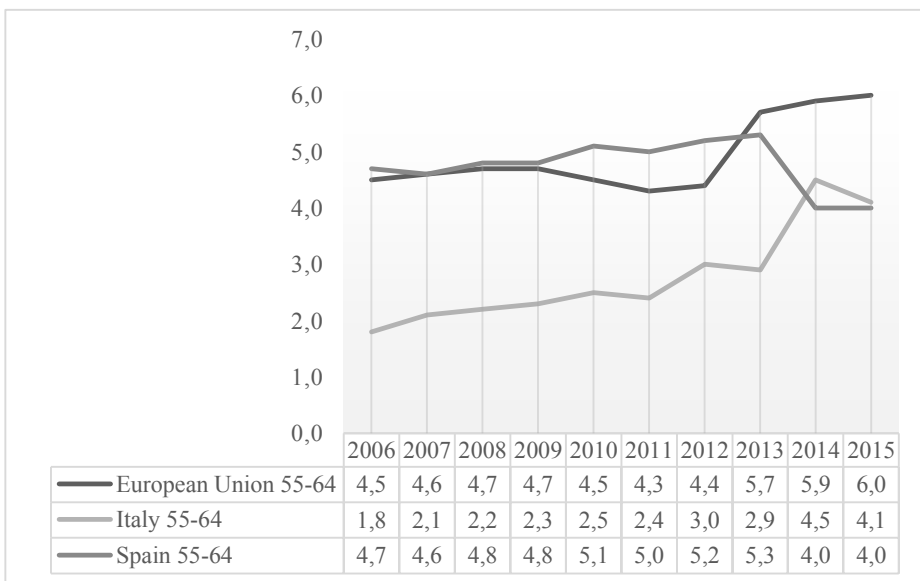


Figure 3

Evolution of the participation in Education of MA (55-64) in Italy, Spain and EU countries (2006-2015)

Source: EUROSTAT (2015). Own processing.

About motivational factors, the most recent Eurostat figures date back to 2007. Figure 4 shows that, for both countries, the internal motivation “To increase knowledge/skills on an interesting subject”, especially in Spain where it reaches a 67% in both age groups, and the external one “To do a better job and/or improve career prospects”, mainly in both countries for the younger group (52% in Italy and 66% in Spain), are the most relevant motivational factors. In the case of Spain, “To get knowledge/skills useful in everyday life” reaches also a high mark in both age groups. According to that, we can argue that the empowering through education is a relevant motivational factor both in Italy and Spain.

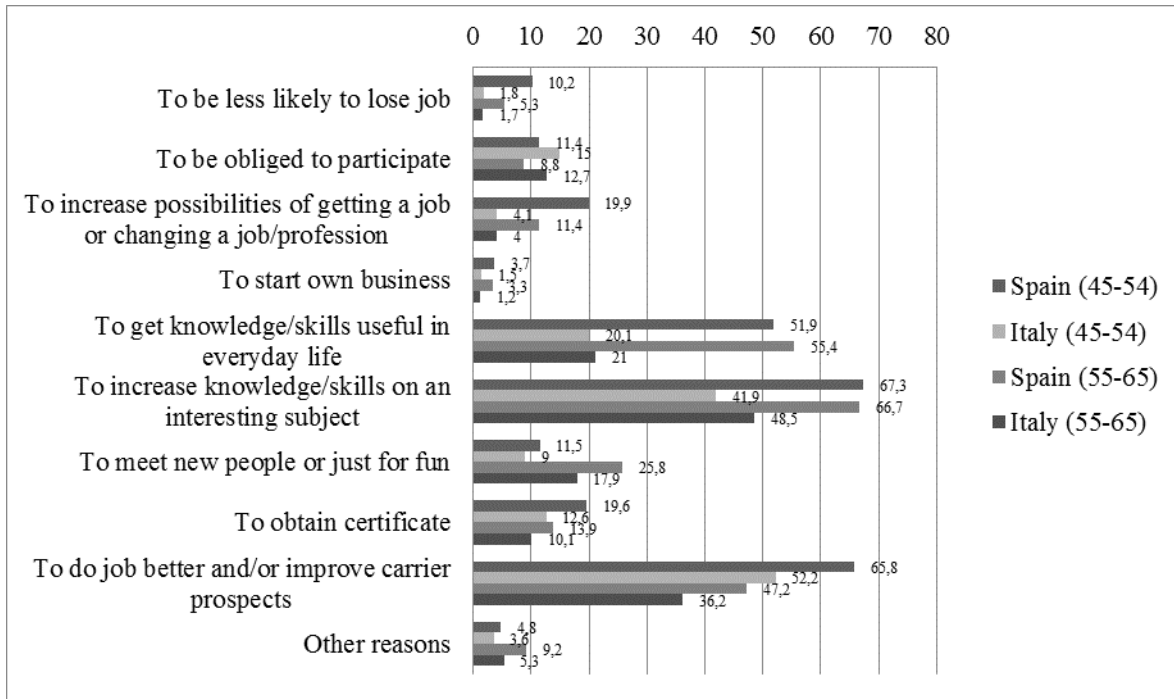


Figure 4
 Factors motivating MAs to undertake learning initiative in Italy and Spain
 Source: EUROSTAT (2007). Own processing.

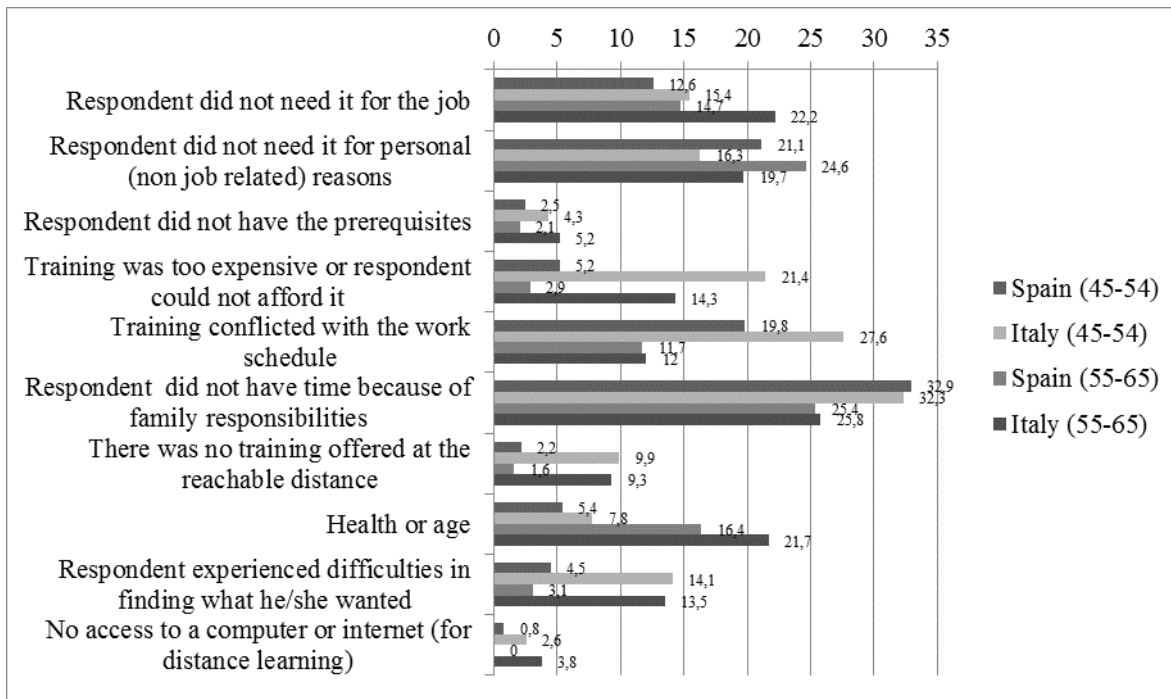


Figure 5

Factors for declining from /not undertaking continued education by Mas IN Italy and Spain

Source: EUROSTAT (2011). Own processing.

If we focus on the obstacles for participation in educational activities (data drawn from the 2011 survey: Figure 5), for both countries the lack of time associated to family responsibilities or work obligations is the most relevant (between 25-32%, and 12-28% respectively for each factor). The “Health or age obstacle” becomes more important for the group of adults over 55 in both countries: 22% for Italians and 16% for Spanish over 55 years old considered that obstacle. The fact of not needing the learning for personal and professional reasons also scores percentages between 16% and 25% in both countries. The most singular difference between Italy and Spain are the cost of education, much more relevant for Italian respondents, reaching a 21% in the younger age group, and in the item “Respondent experienced difficulties in finding what he/she wanted” that it is also more important in Italy, where it reaches 14%. According to that, external obstacles, for example a lack of time for both countries, and the educational offering that doesn’t suit adults needs in Italy, and internal obstacles like age and health, are the most relevant.

Method

In our fieldwork² a questionnaire was designed, distributed online (using Google and SurveyMonkey), or personally administrated when respondents hadn’t access to a computer, among people over 40 years old in the 6 project’s participant countries. From the final completed questionnaires (n=1.066), we have included in these paper the Italian (n_i= 460) and the Spanish (n_s=106) samples. About sampling characteristics: 45-54 age class covers about 50% of the Italian sample, while another 33% is represented by over 55 years old respondents; within the Spanish sample 45-54 age class covers about 33% and over 55 years old another 55%. The distribution by sex is around 60% male and 40% within the Italian sample and 40% male and 60% female within the Spanish one. Another relevant difference between the samples is the high percentage of unemployed respondents within the Italian sample (40%) and of retired people within the Spanish one (22%).

Given the exploratory nature of the study, and the lack of any statistical representativeness objectives due to the characteristics of the people

involved in the samples, the partially filled questionnaires (typical bias of the online questionnaires' administration) have been excluded, what explains missing data for both samples were 0. The sampling technique adopted for the questionnaire was a snowball strategy diffusion, starting with associations for the protection of workers and unemployed people aged over 40 in Italy, and with MA enrolled in the University of Experience in Spain. These are the reasons which explain the mentioned overrepresentation of young and unemployed MA, and older and retired people, respectively. The distribution of the sample is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Distribution of the sample by participating country

| | Frequency | Percentage | Valid percentage | Cumulate percentage |
|---------|-----------|------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Denmark | 48 | 4,5 | 4,5 | 4,5 |
| Spain | 106 | 9,9 | 9,9 | 14,4 |
| Greece | 111 | 10,4 | 10,4 | 24,9 |
| Italy | 460 | 43,2 | 43,2 | 68,0 |
| Poland | 258 | 24,2 | 24,2 | 92,2 |
| Turkey | 83 | 7,8 | 7,8 | 100,0 |
| Total | 1.066 | 100,0 | 100,0 | |

The questionnaire was composed of 111 variables (socio-personal features, behaviours, attitudes and opinions), mostly implemented as Likert scales (in 1-5 scale), aiming at exploring our topic: the participation of MA in learning activities. For the hereby paper, we have focused on those variables strictly related to the obstacles and the motivational factors for that participation.

For the analysis we used the SPSS (version 22) statistical program. The set of the analysis has been implemented in order to identify the underlying structure of the set of variables used in our analysis, to characterize both

Italian and Spanish samples, and to check the influence of the sociodemographic variables in the motivational factors for this social group in both countries.

To characterize both Italian and Spanish samples we ran a descriptive analysis of the 19 items of Motivation (questionnaire's variables ML1.1 – ML 1.8) and Obstacles (questionnaire's variables ML2.1 – ML 2.11) in each country. To compare means between countries an independent-samples t-test was performed, finding small and medium differences in most of mean scores according to eta squared calculation.

After the descriptive analysis, we wanted to identify, by the means of a factor analysis, the underlying structure of the set of variables used in our study, so to check groups of closely related items (i.e. internal and external factors). The 19 items of Motivation and Obstacles for the participation in learning activities were subjected to Principal Components Analysis (PCA). Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of many coefficients of .3 and above both in Italian and Spanish samples. The Kaiser-Meyer-Okin value was .85 for Italian sample and .78 for the Spanish one, exceeding the recommended value of .60 (Kaiser, 1970; 1974) and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) reached statistical significance, supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix.

According to the Italian sample, principal components analysis revealed the presence of five components with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 25,5%, 18,7%, 7,2%, 6,0%, and 5,6% of the variance respectively. On the Spanish sample PCA revealed four components with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 25,3%, 19,6%, 12,1%, and 6,0% of the variance respectively. An inspection of the scree plot revealed a clear break after the third component in both cases. Using the results of Parallel Analysis, it was decided to retain three components for further investigation in both cases, with eigenvalues exceeding the corresponding criterion values for a randomly generated data matrix of the same size (19 variables * 460 respondents in Italy, and 19 variables * 106 respondents in Spain; see Tables 2 and 3).

To aid in the interpretation of these three components in each sample, Varimax rotation was performed. The rotated solution revealed that the three component solutions explained a total of 51,5% of the variance for Italian sample, with Component 1 contributing for 28,8%, component 2 contributing for 18,8%, and Component 3 for 9,9%. For Spanish sample the

rotated solution explained a total of 57,1% of the variance, with Component 1 contributing for 23,3%, component 2 contributing for 19,0%, and Component 3 for 14,8%.

Table 2

Comparison of eigenvalues from PCA and the corresponding criterion values obtained from parallel analysis in Italian sample

| Component Number | Actual eigenvalue from PCA | Criterion value from parallel analysis | Decision |
|------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1 | 4,853 | 1.369 | Accept |
| 2 | 3,544 | 1.305 | Accept |
| 3 | 1,381 | 1.251 | Accept |
| 4 | 1,140 | 1.204 | Reject |
| 5 | 1,06 | 1.161 | Reject |

Table 3

Comparison of eigenvalues from PCA and the corresponding criterion values obtained from parallel analysis in Spanish sample

| Component Number | Actual eigenvalue from PCA | Criterion value from parallel analysis | Decision |
|------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1 | 4,815 | 1.816 | Accept |
| 2 | 3,725 | 1.658 | Accept |
| 3 | 2,310 | 1.533 | Accept |
| 4 | 1,148 | 1.429 | Reject |

Furthermore, to analyse sociodemographic factors that can predict motivational factors or perceived obstacles, a binary logistic regression analysis was conducted. To perform it, we transformed into dichotomous all the independent variables (Age: 40-54, >55; Sex: male, female; Employment status: not working, working; Educational level: ISCED 0-3, ISCED 4-6) and dependent variables (ML1.1.–ML2.11: No, Yes). The model of logistic regression can be expressed as:

$$\text{Logit}(p_i) = \ln(p_i/1-p_i) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \dots + \beta_z X_z$$

where p is the probability of presence of the characteristic of interest, in our case each one of the dependent variables on motivation and obstacles for undertaking educational activities by MA. According to the value of independent variables, we can calculate the estimation of the probability of the presence of the characteristic of interest in the following way:

$$\pi(x) = \frac{e^{(\beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \dots + \beta_z x_z)}}{e^{(\beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \dots + \beta_z x_z)} + 1} = \frac{1}{e^{-(\beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \dots + \beta_z x_z)} + 1}$$

All the variables were tested for the model (Omnibus Test of Model Coefficients, Hosmer and Lemeshow test, p value). When a variable hasn't been significant for predicting the impact in the model, we have removed it. In the Results' section final tables, only the Odd Ratios are presented, showing their significance (p value) and their direction depending on the independent variable indicator (Age: 40-54, >55; Sex: male, female; Employment status: not working, working; Educational level: ISCED 0-3, ISCED 4-6) that was predicting the dependent variable (ML= Yes).

Results

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive univariate analysis of the motivations of MA to participate in educational activities reveals that all the variables analysed obtain higher scores for the Italian sample, however the exploratory character of our sample limits the interpretation of this result. In both cases, as shown in Figure 6, the most valued variables refer to “internal” factors: “The pleasure

of learning itself” (3,9 for the Italian sample and 3,7 for the Spanish one) and “Realizing myself as a person” (3,8 and 3,4 respectively), so there are no significant differences between samples when applying the independent sample test (T-Student). The other variables show that there are differences between the samples, especially in the case of “Being Able to spend at work” and “Making me more autonomous”, with mean scores higher among the Italian respondents (see Table 4).

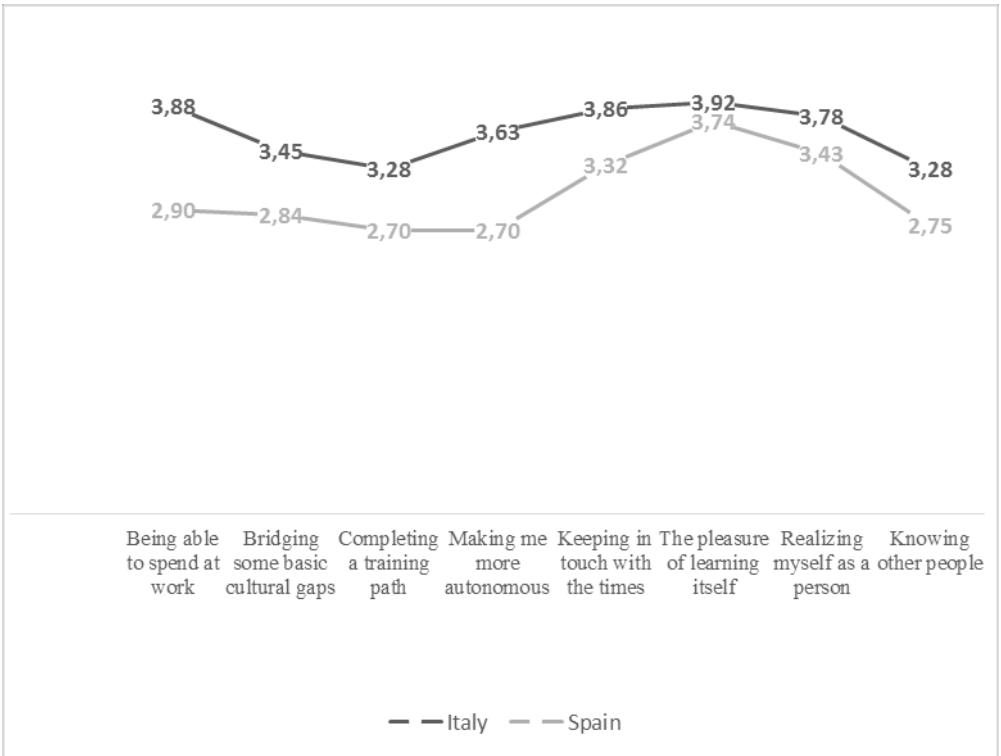


Figure 6
 Comparison between mean scores on motivation for participating in learning activities Italy - Spain

Table 4

Independent Samples Test on motivation for participating in learning activities

| | t-test | Eta squared | Effect (Cohen, 1988) |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------------|-------------------------|
| ML1.1 Being able to spend at work | -6,823** | 0,08 | Moderate |
| ML1.2 Bridging some basic cultural gaps | -5,685** | 0,05 | Small |
| ML1.3 Completing a training path | -4,334** | 0,03 | Small |
| ML1.4 Making me more autonomous | -7,143** | 0,08 | Moderate |
| ML1.5 Keeping in touch with the times | -4,668** | 0,04 | Small |
| ML1.6 The pleasure of learning itself | -1,682 | 0,00 | No differences |
| ML1.7 Realizing myself as a person | -2,769** | 0,01 | No differences |
| ML1.8 Knowing other people and establish relationships | -4,686** | 0,04 | Small |

** $p < 0,01$

Analysing the obstacles of MA to participate in educational activities, and in specular correspondence with which has been already mentioned for the motivations, the scores given to the obstacles by the Spanish sample are higher than the Italian ones, showing a greater reluctance of the population studied to undertake learning activities (Figure 7), again taking into account the features of our samples. In this case, as it is evidenced in Table 5, the

differences between the importance given to the different obstacles are more evident. For Italians, aspects of educational offerings such as “The cost of education” (3,6) and “The difficulty to orient myself among the courses offered in the market” (2,4) are the most important obstacles, revealing the Eta Squared a significant difference from the Spanish sample. For this population, the lack of time is revealed as the most important obstacle (3,0).

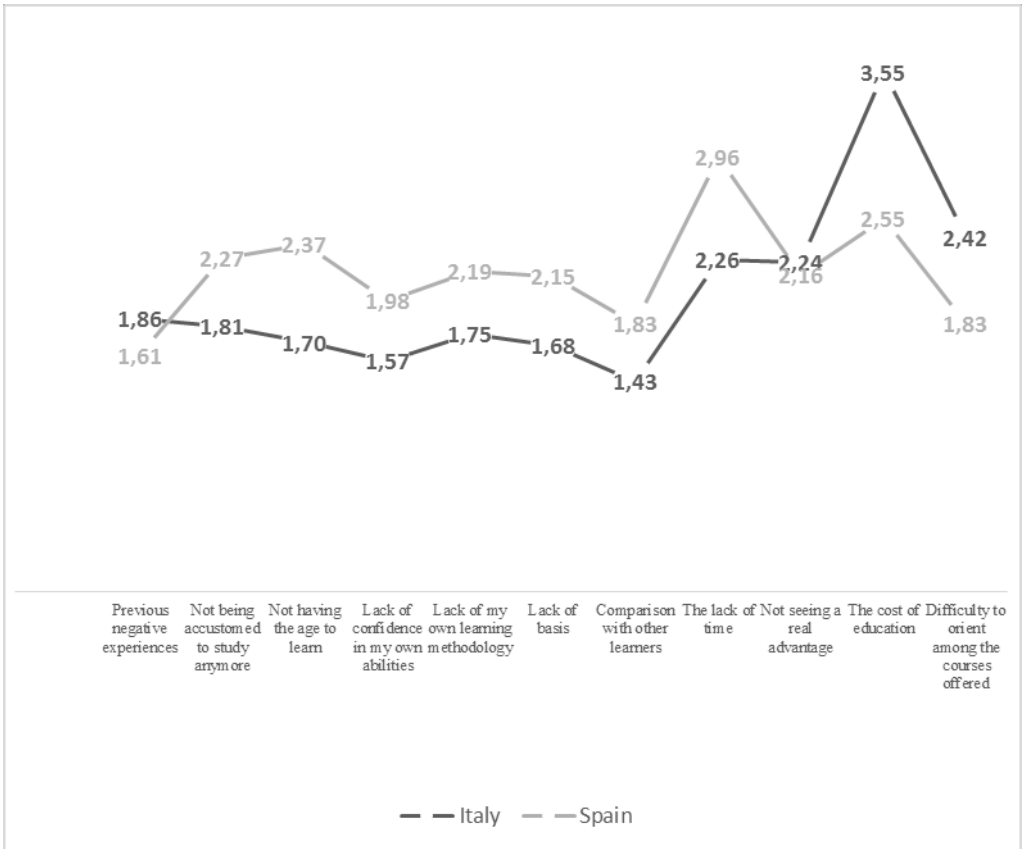


Figure 7
 Comparison between mean scores on obstacles for participating in learning activities Italy – Spain

Table 5
Independent Samples Test on obstacles for participating in learning activities

| | t- test | Eta squared | Effect (Cohen, 1988) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------------|-------------------------|
| ML2.1 Previous negative experiences | -2,706** | 0,01 | No differences |
| ML2.2 Not being accustomed to study anymore | 4,106** | 0,03 | Small |
| ML2.3 Not having the age to learn | 5,378** | 0,05 | Small |
| ML2.4 The lack of confidence in my own abilities as a student | 4,192** | 0,03 | Small |
| ML2.5 The lack of my own learning methodology | 3,705** | 0,02 | Small |
| ML2.6 The lack of basis that would facilitate learning | 3,896** | 0,03 | Small |
| ML2.7 The risk of disfiguring in comparison with other learners | 4,169** | 0,03 | Small |
| ML2.8 The lack of time | 5,064** | 0,04 | Small |
| ML2.9 Not seeing a real advantage | -,733 | 0,00 | No differences |
| ML2.10 The cost of education | -8,144** | 0,11 | Moderate |
| ML2.11 The difficulty to orient myself among the courses offered in the market | -6,390** | 0,07 | Moderate |

** $p < 0,01$

Factor Analysis

In order to explore the scale used and the underlying structure of the variables analysed, a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) for both Italian and Spanish samples has been run separately. In both cases, the structure revealed was in line with the components measured and with literature on motivation and obstacles for participation in education for MA. Despite the differences between the two, both for Italian and Spanish samples, the first component was composed by internal obstacles related to personal features and auto-imposed limitations, like “The lack of confidence in my own abilities as a student”, “The lack of my own learning methodology” or “Not having the age to learn”. The second component was related to motivation factors, with not clear structure in the Italian sample, but revealing in the Spanish one of the highest scores for internal motivational factors, as “Realizing myself as a person”, and the lower ones for external obstacles related to educational offer or working situation, like “The lack of time”. The third component was composed in both samples by external obstacles related to educational offer or working situation, with variables like “The cost of education” (see PCA in Table 6 for Italian sample and Table 7 for Spanish sample).

Table 6
Rotated component matrix. Italy

| | Component | | | Type of factor |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| ML2.4 The lack of confidence in my own abilities as a student | ,863 | | | Internal obstacles related to personal features and auto-imposed limitations |
| ML2.5 The lack of my own learning methodology | ,810 | | | |
| ML2.3 Not having the age to learn | ,808 | | | |
| ML2.2 Not being accustomed to study anymore | ,801 | | | |
| ML2.7 The risk of disfiguring in comparison with other learners | ,750 | | | |
| ML2.6 The lack of basis that would facilitate learning | ,741 | | | |
| ML2.1 Previous negative experiences | ,476 | | | |
| ML1.7 Realizing myself as a person | | ,767 | | Internal and External motivational factors |
| ML1.5 Keeping in touch with the times | | ,762 | | |
| ML1.3 Completing a training path | | ,733 | | |
| ML1.4 Making me more autonomous | | ,729 | | |
| ML1.6 The pleasure of learning itself | | ,622 | | |
| ML1.2 Bridging some basic cultural gaps | | ,605 | | |
| ML1.8 Knowing other people and establish relationships | | ,584 | | |
| ML1.1 Being able to spend at work (or in prospect of work) knowledge and skills acquired | | ,435 | | |
| ML2.9 Not seeing a real advantage | | | ,733 | External obstacles related to educational offer or working situation |
| ML2.10 The cost of education | | | ,723 | |
| ML2.11 The difficulty to orient myself among the courses offered in the market | | | ,567 | |
| ML2.8 The lack of time | | | <,300 | |

Table 7
Rotated component matrix. Spain

| | Component | | | Type of factor |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| ML2.4 The lack of confidence in my own abilities as a student | ,890 | | | Internal obstacles related to personal features and auto-imposed limitations |
| ML2.6 The lack of basis that would facilitate learning | ,857 | | | |
| ML2.5 The lack of my own learning methodology | ,817 | | | |
| ML2.2 Not being accustomed to study anymore | ,787 | | | |
| ML2.7 The risk of disfiguring in comparison with other learners | ,732 | | | |
| ML2.3 Not having the age to learn | ,509 | | | |
| ML1.7 Realizing myself as a person | | ,853 | | Internal motivational factors |
| ML1.2 Bridging some basic cultural gaps | | ,696 | | |
| ML1.6 The pleasure of learning itself | | ,659 | | |
| ML1.4 Making me more autonomous | | ,654 | | |
| ML1.3 Completing a training path | | ,633 | | External motivational factors |
| ML1.8 Knowing other people and establish relationships | | ,627 | | |
| ML1.5 Keeping in touch with the times | | ,623 | | |
| ML2.8 The lack of time | | | ,831 | External obstacles related to educational offer or working situation. |
| ML2.9 Not seeing a real advantage | | | ,774 | |
| ML2.11 The difficulty to orient myself among the courses offered in the market | | | ,646 | |
| ML2.10 The cost of education | | | ,546 | |
| ML1.1 Being able to spend at work (or in prospect of work) knowledge and skills acquired | | | ,545 | |
| ML2.1 Previous negative experiences | | | ,349 | |

Logistic Regression

Lastly, since the literature argues that the social and personal features of the group of MA influences both their motivations and the obstacles faced for participating in educational activities, we turn to a binary logistic regression with both samples, in order to find out whether some of the sociodemographic variables can predict the presence of any of those factors.

Regarding motivations, being equal all the other conditions, Table 8 shows that the relatively younger age and the high level of unemployment of the Italian respondents determine the importance given to factors related to the usefulness of what it is learned, like “Being able to spend at work” and “Completing a training path”, as well as internal motivation as “Realizing myself as a person”. The odd ratios (OR) are higher in the relationship between being a woman and being empowered through educational activities, influencing the relevance given to variables such as “Keeping in touch with the times” and “Realizing myself as a person”. If social relationships that could be established in courses are relevant to people who did not work, for those who work “Keeping in touch with the times” takes on a greater importance, also for people with lower educational levels.

About the Spanish sample, with the other conditions being equal, being younger, working, and having educational level over ISCED 4 are related to the relevance given to spend the knowledge at work, scoring the highest OR for the two latter personal features (see Table 9). Also being below 55 and work can predict the importance given to “Completing a training path”. As for the Italian sample, the relationship between being a woman and being empowered through educational activities (autonomy and realizing as a person) is relevant. For people not working and with lower levels of education, the social relationships are important.

Table 8

Effect of socio-demographic variables on motivation factors for learning in Italy (OR)

| | | ML1.1. Being able to spend at work | ML1.3. Completing a training path | ML 1.5 Keeping in touch with the times | ML 1.7. Realizing myself as a person | ML 1.8. Knowing other people and establish relationships |
|-------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Age | 40-54 | ,29** | ,57** | | ,41** | |
| | >55 | | | | | |
| Sex | Male | | | | | |
| | Female | | | 3,05** | 2,10* | |
| Employment status | Not Working | | | | | ,60* |
| | Working | | | 1,90* | | |
| Educational level | ISCED 0-3 | | | ,48* | | |
| | ISCED 4-6 | | | | | |

* $p < 0,05$ ** $p < 0,01$

Table 9

Effect of socio-demographic variables on motivation factors for learning in Spain (OR)

| | | ML1.1. Being able to spend at work | ML1.3. Completing a training path | ML 1.4. Making me more autonomous | ML 1.7. Realizing myself as a person | ML 1.8. Knowing other people and establish relationships |
|-------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Age | 40-54 | ,19** | ,25** | | ,30* | |
| | >55 | | | | | |
| Sex | Male | | | | | |
| | Female | | | 3,82** | 3,39* | |
| Employment status | Not Working | | | | | ,286* |
| | Working | 5,36** | 2,44* | | | |
| Educational level | ISCED 0-3 | | | | | ,32** |
| | ISCED 4-6 | 4,14** | | | | |

* $p < 0,05$ ** $p < 0,01$

If we focus on obstacles for the participation of the Italian group in education, we appreciate in Table 10 that age doesn't affect any of the factors. On the other hand, holding all the other conditions constant, sex determines more insecurity for men when they face the learning possibility, "Not having the age to learn" and "The lack of basis that would facilitate learning", and more sensibility to the cost of education are relevant factors for women. Not working and having a lower education can predict factors associated to self-imposed insecurity like "The lack of confidence in my own abilities as a student" or "The lack of my own learning methodology", being added for the group below ISCED 3 other factors related to that lack of confidence for learning and its methodology. The fact of not working is also related to the educational offer, like not seeing the course as a real advantage or being sensitive to its price. The highest OR corresponds to the influence of being working and the lack of time.

For the Spanish sample, obstacles related to the educational offering, as not seeing a real advantage of its price, can be determined by the age and sex, being the younger group and being a woman the most sensitive to these aspects, being equal all the other conditions. As it happened to the Italian sample, the fact of not working and/or having lower levels of education can make people more insecure at the time of undertaking a learning activity, accusing the lack of confidence, methodology or basis for learning. As well as for the Italians, the working status can determinate the given relevance to the lack of time obstacle (Table 11).

Table 10

Effect of socio-demographic variables on obstacle for learning in Italy (OR)

| | | ML2.1 Previous negative experience s | ML2.2 Not being accustomed to study anymore | ML2.3 Not having the age to learn | ML2.4 The lack of confidence in my own abilities as a student | ML2.5 The lack of my own learning methodology | ML2.6 The lack of basis that would facilitate learning | ML2.8 The lack of time | ML2.9 Not seeing a real advantage | ML 2.10 The Cost of education |
|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Age | 40-54 | | | | | | | | | |
| | >55 | | | | | | | | | |
| Sex | Male | | | ,51** | | | ,51* | | | |
| | Female | | | | | | | | | 2,60** |
| Emmployment status | Not Working | ,52** | | | ,58* | ,66** | | | ,57** | ,45** |
| | Working | | | | | | 8,27** | | | |
| Educational level | ISCED 0-3 | | ,52** | ,46** | ,31** | ,44** | ,52* | | | |
| | ISCED 4-6 | | | | | | | | | |

* $p < 0,05$ ** $p < 0,01$

Table 11

Effect of socio-demographic variables on obstacle for learning in Spain (OR)

| | | ML2.2 Not being accustomed to study anymore | ML2.3 Not having the age to learn | ML2.4 The lack of confidence in my own abilities as a student | ML2.5 The lack of my own learning methodology | ML2.6 The lack of basis that would facilitate learning | ML2.7 The risk of disfiguring in comparison with other learners | ML2.8 The lack of time | ML2.9 Not seeing a real advantage | ML 2.10 The Cost of education |
|-------------------|-------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Age | 40-54 | | | | | | | | ,33* | ,34* |
| | >55 | ,22** | | | | | | | | |
| Sex | Male | | | | | | | | | |
| | Female | | | | | | | | 4,69* | 2,28* |
| Employment status | Not Working | | | ,30* | ,35* | ,22* | ,19* | | | |
| | Working | | | | | | | 4,42* | | |
| Educational level | ISCED 0-3 | | ,30** | ,26* | ,23** | 0,19** | ,09** | | | |
| | ISCED 4-6 | | | | | | | | | |

* $p < 0,05$ ** $p < 0,01$

Discussion

In recent years, public institutions and the scientific community have increased efforts to find the motivational aspects that lead the MA to learn, as new proposals to involve them in inclusive education. In spite of that, this interest hasn't had the expected response within society. As evidenced by the data of MA's participation in educational activities, over the past 10 years there has not been a considerable increase in these figures; furthermore, in countries like Spain, in the last two years the figures have been even in recession (Eurostat, 2015). Therefore, MA education remains a challenge for today's society (López & Sarrate, 2005), because an increase in that kind of participation would determine an improvement in their personal, professional, and social conditions (Jancewicz et al., 2015). Beyond that, as it is established by authors like Green (2011), incorporation or re-incorporation of adult education would promote social cohesion by providing a more egalitarian society.

Despite some academics' interest in MAL (Van Vianen, 1997; Chao, 2009; González & Maeso, 2005; Houle, 1974; Oliveira, 2013; Gorges & Kandler, 2012; Hubackova & Semradova, 2014; Gengenfurten & Vauras, 2012), the study of the motivational aspects that can increase the participation of this social group to learning is still in an embryonic state. With our analysis we have tried to explore and demonstrate the complexity of the variables that compose these motivational factors, as well as underlying the difficulties of access to educational activities taking as example the countries of Italy and Spain.

The obstacles to MA involvement in educational activities could explain that both Italy and Spain are still in a slight disadvantage compared to Europe, although in Italy the trend is positive, at least lastly, according to official figures (Eurostat, 2015). This fact is also noticeable according to the results of our fieldwork, where, despite sample size and biases, the Italian respondents give greater value to the motivational aspects (mean 3,64 versus 3,05 of the Spanish sample) and minor value to the obstacles (2,11 compared to 2,20 of the Spanish sample).

Regarding the type of motivations, our questionnaire results are consistent with the Adult Education Survey (AES, Eurostat, 2007). In both samples of our study, internal aspects such as "The pleasure of learning

itself”, or “Realising myself as a person” get high ratings (between 3,5 and 4,0 in both cases), while the AES “To increase knowledge on an interesting subject” ranks first also for the two countries. Relevance given to internal aspects that the PCA also demonstrates in both groups. Undoubtedly, the utilitarianism of education can’t be removed, as we have seen in our study: in Italian sample, the “being able to spend the knowledge at work” scored as the second main motivation (3,88), being also important for the younger sample (45-54) in that country, and for people in working condition in the Spanish sample as well, according to the logistic regression analysis. But in the bivariate analysis we could also find, for example, that women understood education as a way of improving personal empowerment, stressing the importance given to variables such as “Keeping in touch with the times” and “Realizing myself as a person”. This importance given to personal development through education reinforces the hypothesis that MA do not seek exclusively for an instrumental application of their knowledge, but also for comprehensive empowerment and personal enrichment. This idea is aligned with the concept of LWL developed very recently (Reischmann, 2014). Learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together (International Bureau of Education-UNESCO, 2008), ultimately, represent a more integral and human-centred approach to learning (Faure et al., 1972; Delors et al., 1996; Sen, 1999) overcoming the economic and utilitarian approach to learning of past decades and stereotypes associated to inactivity of mature adults (Poli, 2013).

About the obstacles, the results of our study were also aligned with Eurostat (2011). In both analysis, the MA’s lack of time was a relevant factor for all groups, while it is evident in the case of the Italian sample the relevance of obstacles related to the educational offering (expensive and not tailored on the needs of the respondents), aspects also pointed out by the literature and international reports on AL (UNESCO, 2010). Beside these obstacles we can add some personal variables and auto-imposed limitations that can represent risk factors for not undertaking educational activities, as it emerged with the logistic regression analysis and PCA for both samples. Indeed, not working and having a low educational attainment can predict internal obstacles, especially related to the lack of self-confidence. In this sense, age doesn’t represent a variable explaining the difficulties of accessing to education, as it is defended in some previous research (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004; Van Vianen, 1997; Chao, 2009; González & Maeso,

2005), but rather other structural factors related to education and employment, as we have discussed.

Conclusion

The exploratory study of samples of two countries of Mediterranean Europe, such as Italy and Spain, allowed us to approach the reality of the MA and their still limited participation in educational activities. Through this exploratory analysis we have demonstrated that, despite some differences due to the sampling features, strong similarities can be found between both groups, as it has been shown in the descriptive analysis, the PCA, and the logistic regression. Similarities that are also aligned to the official statistics, as we stressed in the Discussion section. In both samples the relevance given to factors related to personal development asks for the need to overcome the exclusionary idea of age as a factor of demotivation; on the contrary, age has to be understood as an opportunity for developing those internal motivations taking advantage of positive MA features (experience, cultural and social knowledge, resilience, etc.) for their inclusion in education.

The multiplicity of evidences that we have found in the variables which affects the MA involvement in education shows that learning is not only Lifelong but also Lifewide, covering a great variety of motivations and ways of learning. Formal, non-formal and informal education are a whole and inseparable framework which can fulfil different MA needs which originate from work applicability to personal empowerment. This idea is aligned to the new conception of education as an integral, continue and wide phenomenon.

However, as even international organizations show, education offered to adults is still fragmented, and doesn't take into account the whole picture that different studies, including ours, are claiming for. Training of students of all ages, for their effective participation in society, and even more in the case of traditional excluded groups such as MA, requires an integral and holistic education based on standards that, taking into account their consistent and sensitive practical knowledge and previous cultural background, promotes the domain of different skills that can cover academic knowledge, alphabetization, socioemotional learning, cultural conscience, and so on. Ultimately, a more integral and human-centred approach to

learning, overcoming the economic and utilitarian approach to learning of past decades.

In that sense, previous studies like Houle's (1996) already defended patterns of learner-centred programming as the best approach for MAL. Based on this, new innovative theories, more attractive and dynamic methodologies, which understand learning as a continuous and integral process, are being developed for AL in recent years (Hoggan et al., 2009). Paradigmatic examples of this are the Dialogical Gatherings (Flecha, 2008) or the Telling of Life Stories (Michelson, 2011).

As data evidences, in the process of ageing there is a decrease in the participation in educational activities, and as we have shown, other personal variables like the educational attainment or the working status can be an obstacle for internal motivations. As we have stated, MAL is not an isolated island but a vast ocean. According to that, based on larger and/or more representative samples, a more in-depth research on MAL needs, motivations, methodologies, or patterns of learning is required in order to align the educational offering to what society asks for. This will give the opportunity to MA to equip themselves to act, think, and respond appropriately to the personal, social, political, economic, cultural, and technological challenges that they have to face in their daily lives.

Notes

¹ For more information on Lifelong Learning in both countries, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) publishes general and thematic reports that can be consulted on: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/es>.

² The detailed characteristics of the sample, the complete T-Student test, and the full results of logistic regression analysis can be consulted to the authors.

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