

**Viktor Arnold / Finn Koenemund**

# Adult education policies, participation and social inequalities and their relationship

A cross-country comparison of Germany and Austria

**Diploma Thesis**

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**Applying a human capital theory approach to investigate  
the relationship between adult education policies,  
participation and social inequalities**

To what extent is policy-learning possible?

A cross-country comparison between Austria and Germany

**Joint Master's Thesis Project  
Submitted by**

**Viktoria Arnold  
Finn Koenemund**

Master of Public Policy 2020

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## **Executive Summary**

Adult education systems are powerful mechanisms at the disposal of governments to help individuals adapt to altering labour market needs and changing skill requirements. Ideally, they should permit regular re- and upskilling in a knowledge-based economy, help overcome barriers and incentivise individuals to participate in adult education. This thesis focuses on Austria and Germany, two European countries that are not only most similar with regards to their welfare regimes and capitalist systems, but also particularly affected by automation. It aims at determining to what extent Austria's 2011 and Germany's 2019 lifelong learning strategies are reflective of and influence individuals' incentives to enhance participation in adult education as well as identifying barriers preventing participation, particularly of underrepresented group. The research question is being examined through the lens of human capital and rational choice theory and addressed in three steps: To begin with, the two strategies are analysed. In a next step, regression analyses of Adult Education Survey (AES) data provide insights regarding participation in training as well as incentives and barriers faced by different sub-groups. Ultimately, it is investigated whether the Austrian strategy had a positive impact and the findings are extrapolated to the German case.

It is found that, albeit to a limited extent, the two strategies are reflective of individuals' incentives to enhance participation in adult education and remove barriers that prevent participation. The relevance to focus on underrepresented groups is highlighted in both strategies. However, the results from the regression analyses indicate that in some aspects the different groups are considered too generic. Examining the issue against the tenets of human capital and rational choice theory, it is found that the responsibility to invest in adult education should not only and never exclusively be laid on individuals. Instead, employers and the state should invest in enhancing the incentives and reducing the barriers that individuals face. Especially in the future of work context, devising well-targeted incentives and removing barriers to increase equity and inclusiveness in access to training is key.

To the authors' best knowledge, this study is the first systematic cross-country comparison that takes an individual learner-centred perspective to shed light on how to design adult education systems that incentivise people to participate considering socio-economic background factors.



## List of Abbreviations

AES	Adult Education Survey
CI	Confidence Interval
CMEs	Coordinated Market Economies
EC	European Commission
EFTA	European Free Trade Area
EU	European Union
HCT	Human Capital Theory
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ISCO	International Standard Classification of Occupations
KEBÖ	Conference of Austrian Adult Education
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LLL:2020	Austria's Lifelong Learning Strategy
NA	No Answer
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development
RCT	Rational Choice Theory
Ref.	Reference category
VoC	Varieties of Capitalism