

A Comparative Analysis of Norwegian and Irish Adult Education  
White Papers; Respectively Entitled *The Education Act*, 2014 and  
the *Learning for Life* Document of 2000.

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Document of 2000.

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## **Abstract**

Adult education is growing in importance across the EU and OECD countries. The labor market is continually changing, thus the skilling and reskilling policies of nations who want to maintain economic and social progress, must reflect and facilitate such change. This Masters thesis will carry out a comparative analysis of the adult education white papers of Norway, who have a long tradition of adult education policies, and Ireland, who are relatively new to the adult education policy scene. This task has not yet been initiated by the research community.

Qualitative discourse analysis will be used as a research method. Meyer (1997) world society theory will be employed to explore the role and influence of the multinational organizations, the EU and OECD, on the national white papers. This study will also examine the guiding principles behind the documents, using social capital theory and human capital theory as lens through which the white papers can be viewed. The thesis concludes by identifying the successes and failings of both systems, and making recommendations on ways in which to improve the infrastructure of both the Norwegian and Irish adult education systems.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Abbreviations

ALL	Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey
APL	Accreditation of Prior Learning
BKA	Programme for Basic Competence in Working Life
BTEI	Back To Education Initiative
CSO	Central Statistics Office
ESL	Early School Leaver
EU	European Union
IALS	International Adult Literacy Survey
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDES	Irish Department for Education and Skills
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NAPS	National Anti-Poverty Strategy
NAV	Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NMER	Norwegian Ministry for Education and Research
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OMC	Open Method Coordination
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
PLC	Post Leaving Cert
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VOX	Agency for Adult Learning
WBL	Work-Based Learning



# 1 Adult Education in Context; An Introduction to the Problem

Adult education has emerged as an important educational policy issue, increasingly so over the last twenty years. Many international and transnational organizations such as The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU) have advocated policies that reflect the value of adult education (Rasmussen, 2009). National governments, mainly industrialized, have echoed this, and adult education is visible on government educational proposals.

While the search for oil and the exploitation of natural resources continues throughout the world, a different type of natural resource is being recognized within each nation; that is its people. In business the competitive advantage is no longer exclusively based on the best machinery, but rather the best skills set. ‘Corporate leaders are saying that people are our most important advantage’ (Hiniker & Putman, 2009, p.203). Thus, investing in skills will strengthen the human capital of the labor market, which is advantageous within a knowledge led global economy (OECD, 2014c).

Most western countries, including Norway and Ireland, are experiencing demographic change which is driving the need for lifelong learning policies. Falling birth rates and rising life expectancy, results in an added pressure on the economy. Therefore promoting the reskilling and upskilling of the available workforce is an imperative of adult education policies, which are an effort to maximize the employment levels of the working age population (Holford et al., 2007).

The purpose of this study is to critically investigate the adult education white papers of Ireland and Norway entitled respectively ‘*Learning for Life*’ released in July 2000 and ‘*Education Act*’ last amended in 2014. While the initial plan for this research was to compare

the Norwegian document 'Fra utenforskap til ny sjanse' which was released in February 2016 with the Irish white paper, the document was not made available in English. Therefore the researcher had to forgo that option and pursue the investigation of the most recent document available in English.

Both countries are in the OECD. Ireland is in the European Union (EU) whilst Norway, even though it 'is not a member of the European Union, often follows EU recommendations in various fields, including adult education' (EAEA, 2014, p, 35).

Historically 'lifelong learning is an important principle in Norwegian education policy' (OECD, 2014b, p. 39). Social justice and equity are strong, therefore the adult education system makes it easier for disadvantaged adults to participate (NALA, 2011). Norway's adult population enjoy a high level of basic skills in literacy, numeracy and Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

The researcher will compare the Irish and Norwegian white papers in order to illustrate how the documents compare considering Ireland's novice stature and the long standing tradition of emphasizing adult education in Norway. It has, since the beginning of its oil exploration in the 1970s, been financially able to accord great resources to the development of education. Ireland however has been hit by severe economic setbacks in recent years, which negatively impacted on budgets for adult education set out in its 2000 white paper.

The Irish white paper is worthy of scrutiny due to its comprehensiveness, and contains many initiatives to reconnect with those who have been outside of the educational domain, or who are at risk of leaving school and potentially leaving the sphere of education or employment.

For the duration of this paper high school dropouts will be referred to as Early School Leavers (ESL). The definition of which according to the EU is;

*'Those who left school without completing secondary education, or experienced a lack of success at the end of upper secondary school, that is, left without qualifications'* (Brooks & Burton, 2008, p. 6).



For the purpose of this research adult education will be defined in line with the EU definition, and it is worthy of note that it bears resemblance to the definition offered in the Irish white paper which encompasses;

*'the entire range of formal, non-formal and informal learning activities — both general and vocational — undertaken by adults after leaving initial education and training'* (EPALE, 2016).

This thesis will examine the scope of influence the OECD and the EU have within the white papers. It will also critically analyze the documents to uncover the principles directing the course of adult education in both countries. The overall aim of both adult education systems is to attract more adult learners and strengthen the trend of lifelong learning. An additional purpose of this paper is to identify areas in which each country has enjoyed positive results, and areas in which each country could improve. The researcher intends to investigate the white papers to uncover and compare initiatives that help reduce ESL rates and re-engage with those who fell through the cracks in their initial schooling. The research questions to guide this process are as follows;

- ❑ What dimensions of Irish and Norwegian adult education policies are subject to the influence of the OECD and EU?
- ❑ What are the dominant principles within both the Irish and Norwegian adult education white papers?
- ❑ What are the areas in which Irish and Norwegian adult education infrastructure have had favorable outcomes? Similarly, what are the areas in which they could improve?

# **2 Methodology and Methods**

This chapter will focus on the methodology of the research at hand. It will explain the methods and techniques of data collection and analysis. In social science there are two main models of research; qualitative and quantitative. Each model holds assumptions about reality and knowledge, society and human nature, and methodology and theory with a distinctive analysis of social life. They underpin the philosophical debates from rival intellectual traditions (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). The qualitative aspect of social science is the main focus of the coming paragraphs with side glances towards a comparison to quantitative research.

## **2.1 Philosophical and Theoretical Assumptions of Qualitative Research**

Both quantitative and qualitative paradigms have respectively objective and subjective dimensions (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Qualitative research tries to understand the participant's view of reality in relation to the phenomena under investigation (Merriam, 2002). It rejects the proposal that social science can be an objective enterprise. Qualitative research contains an inductive rather than deductive mode of inquiry. The research normally begins in an open ended way, and entails a gradual narrowing down of research questions or problems. Inductive reasoning begins with specific observations before beginning to detect patterns and regularities. However, one can also start from a deductive hunch or arguments, in order to plan the questions to be addressed. Modern technology has made it easier to pursue statistical explorations prior to honing in on the topic.

Qualitative research is mainly concerned with words rather than numbers as a way ‘to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon’ (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). Research questions tend to be general at the beginning, and can be revised and changed depending on factors which may arise throughout the course of the research. Dependence on theory and literature is not as important in the initial stages of research when compared to quantitative methods. An analytical framework may or may not be considered to guide data collection and analysis, or inform research questions. This research although qualitative in nature adopted a quantitative character in the form of the deductive process of inquiry. The researcher formulated questions and chose the analytical framework at the beginning of the research, in order to compensate for time constraints. Qualitative discourse analysis is the method of enquiry for this research and is flexible when it comes to procedures and theoretical assumptions. It searches for meaning within a document. Therefore strict adherence to the assumptions related to ontology, epistemology, human nature and methodology, as laid out by Burrell & Morgan (1979, p. 3), are not crucial in this regard.

## **2.2 Critique of Qualitative Research**

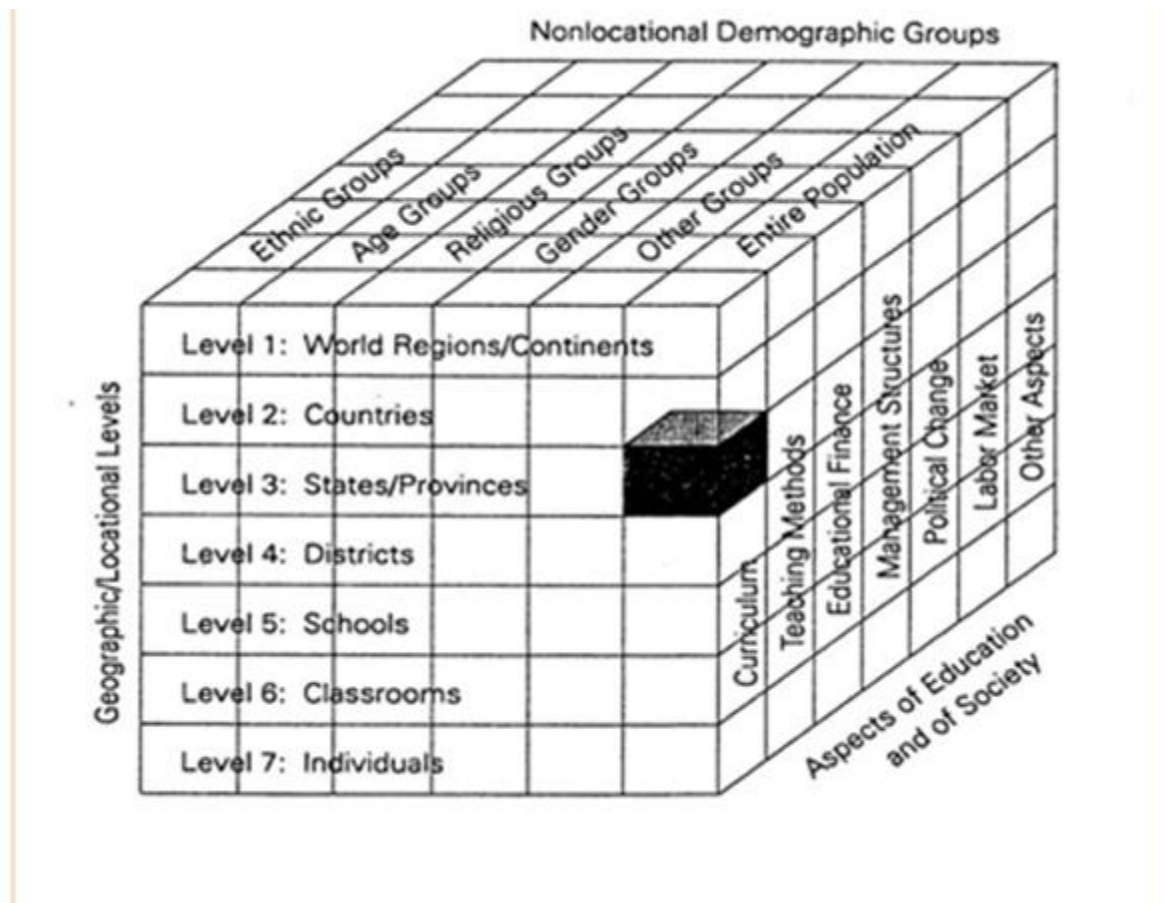
Qualitative Research comes under criticism because the research is perceived as being too subjective. The studies are difficult or almost impossible to replicate. This is due to a lack of standard procedures which causes the data to be heavily interpreted by the views of the researcher. It can be difficult to establish what the researcher actually did, and how they arrived at the conclusion of the study. The finding of qualitative research cannot typically be generalized to other settings. However this area is being increasingly addressed by qualitative researchers (Bryman, 2012).

## 2.3 The Bray and Thomas Cube

Within comparative educational research there are different levels of comparison as set out by the Bray and Thomas cube, which widened the scope for depth of comparison.

Observations can take place on three levels as demonstrated by the cube.

In the example below comparison is being made, firstly at a geographical level, between states/province, secondly, on location demographic groups comparison will take place within the entire population, and lastly, curriculum is the aspect of education and society that will be examined.



(Bray, Adamson & Mason, 2014, p. 9).

In the case of this research, comparison will take place on the geographic/location level 2, at country level. Amidst the aspects of education and society, comparison will be made on a political change level, in the form of white papers. The final level of comparison comes at the non-locational demographic groups, where this research will focus on the age groups dimension as the policies focus fundamentally on adults in education. This research will engage with all three levels, therefore it is explicitly comparative.

## **2.4 Research Design**

A research design is the plan of action that links the philosophical assumptions to specific methods. Bryman (2012) defines it as ‘a structure that guides the execution of a research method and the analysis of the subsequent data’ (p. 45) through which researchers investigate their topic.

Research designs in qualitative research do not have a formulated pattern. The different stages can interact with each other throughout the research. There is no clear blueprint and academics have not reached a consensus on how to categorize the different approaches. However Merriam (2002) provides a concise representation of the different research methods. She states that ‘Qualitative research is an umbrella term that encompasses several philosophical and theoretical orientations, the most common being interpretive, critical and postmodern’ (p. 15). This study would fall under the category of interpretive qualitative research because it is interested in discovering the processes contained within the adult education system and the world-views that are upheld by the white papers. ‘A rich descriptive account of the findings is presented and discussed, using references to the literature’ (Merriam, 2002, p. 15) to frame the study.

### **2.4.1 Discourse Analysis**

Discourse analysis has a short history dating back to the 1970s. It integrates the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault. To him discourse is rhetoric relating to a subject; it is framed by how we understand the subject. For example, if one were a human capital theorist, education would be viewed mainly as an economic tool. Therefore the rhetoric relating to education would be framed with human capital logic. ‘The discourse then becomes a frame for justification’ (Bryman, 2012, p. 528). Discourse analysis is anti-realist in principle, in that it ‘denies there is an external reality awaiting a definitive portrayal by the researcher and it therefore disavows the notion that any researcher can arrive at a privileged account of the social world being investigated’ (Ibid, p. 529 ). This in opposition to Altheide (1996) who stated that researchers can arrive at the same conclusion if they analyze the same data under the same conditions. A realist position is possible and may be closer to the classic concerns of social science. Discourse analysis is constructionist, in that the emphasis is placed on the reality that is offered by participants and their construction of that reality through their depiction of it (Ibid).

There is a general shift in social science towards an interest in language and thus an interest in discourse. Contemporary discourse analysis is interdisciplinary in character, therefore no single method or definition has evolved (Tesch, 2013; Alvesson & Karreman, 2000). It is not a unified body of theory, method, and practice, different disciplines have their own research traditions; therefore discourse analysis is without a definitive interpretation. The discussion and definitions that follow will focus on the kind of analysis that is used within social science.

Fairclough, Mulderrig & Wodak (2011) explain discourse as ‘an analytical category describing the vast array of meaning-making available to us’ (p. 357). It is viewed as both an account of events in society and it is also a process where meaning is created (Bryman,

2012). Bowen (2009) states that ‘document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents’ (p. 2). It requires data to be examined and interpreted in order to gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge. It is a ‘research method for rigorously and systematically analyzing the contents of written documents’ (Wach & Ward (2013, p. 1).

The use of the term discourse can be problematic for some researchers in that ‘discourse sometimes comes close to standing for everything, and thus nothing’ (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000, p. 1128). However in this context discourse is made up of language, which ‘arranges and naturalizes the social world in a specific way thus informs social practice’ (Ibid, p. 1128), which can be interpreted as a realist understanding of discourse. The definition of discourse analysis that will be operationalized in this research is given by Fairclough et al. (2011), who state that ‘discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially shaped’ (p. 358). It helps to maintain and sustain social status quo. Language is perceived as producing the social world, and is socially influential.

#### **2.4.2 Qualitative Discourse Analysis in this Study**

Qualitative discourse analysis is applicable to intensive studies that provide rich descriptions (Bowen, 2009). ‘Interviews, observations and documents are the three traditional sources of data in a qualitative research study’ (Merriam, 2002, p. 13). This research will analyze documents to critically examine the current adult education white papers of the Republic of Ireland and Norway.

The term document can cover a wide variety of sources. Merriam (1988) stated that documents aid the researcher to uncover meaning and develop understanding in order to answer the research questions (p. 118). In this research, the documents analyzed are the official and are derived from the state. They are in the public domain and were not produced

for the researcher, thus they are non-reactive which rules out the risk of a reactive effect that could limit the validity of the data (Bryman, 2012, p. 543). To assess the quality of a document Scott (2014) recommends that a researcher should consider the following criteria;

- ‘1. Authenticity; is the evidence genuine and of unquestionable origin?
2. Credibility; is the evidence free from error and distortion?
3. Representativeness; is the evidence typical of its kind, and, if not, is the extent of it untypically known?
4. Meaning; is the evidence clear and comprehensible?’ (p. 544).

All of these criteria were considered in the course of this research. The documents were authentic as they were located within the government's websites. They were credible although the Irish document did have more than a few typos such as spelling gaining as gaaing (IDES, 2000, p.15) and children was spelt childrenis (Ibid, p. 9). It was also not cited to a high standard in that it directly quoted reports and did not give a page number (Ibid, p. 82, p. 88 p. 111, p. 123, p. 138, p. 143, p. 163). There was another instance where an OECD report is quoted, but that report was not contained within the bibliography (Ibid, p. 54). It begs the question if the only adult education white paper from the Irish government was proof read before its release?

Document analysis encompass several parts such as finding and gaining access to documents, collecting data from said documents, organizing and analyzing the data (Altheide & Schneider, 2012). Gill (2000) writes about skeptical reading, which means that the researcher is searching for an underlying purpose responsible for the way in which a document is presented. She draws attention to four major themes within discourse analysis. Two of these relate to this research. The first is; discourse can be a form of action. Discourse



is not a neutral device through which meaning is conveyed. It may be used as a device for action. The documents are official and are written with a distinct purpose and message. They are putting into action an infrastructure that can support adult education. Gill (2000) argues that language is viewed 'as a practice in its own right' (p. 175), and can be a way of accomplishing acts.

The other theme which relates to this research is; discourse as rhetorically organized.

Discourse analysts realize that discourse is concerned with presenting one interpretation 'of the world in the face of a competing version' (Ibid, p. 176). In this regard one must bear in mind that the governments want to present themselves in the best possible light. Therefore the documents may contain some biases, which may in themselves be interesting as they could reveal the guiding principles of the government. However, one must proceed cautiously when 'attempting to treat them as depictions of reality' (Bryman, 2012, p. 550). For this reason the researcher looked outside of the two main documents and gleaned information from various report, from the government bodies, Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and social researchers. This will provide a fuller picture as to the success and failings of each system. It will also provide recourse for a future focus element of the research through which the researcher can recommend areas which may need further attention. The other two themes of discourse prepossessed by Gill relate to, discourse as a topic and, the concept that language is constructive. For more on these see Gill (2000, p. 174).

Many different types of analysis lay claim to the description of discourse analysis. Gill (2000) states that there are at least 57 types. She puts forward a formulation of steps which can be followed to a greater or lesser extent. The first is the formulation of research questions, followed by the choosing of texts to be analyzed. The inclusion criteria for the documents within this study were that the documents were available in a language the researcher could competently read and analyze. It was also essential that they were related to

adult education, and that the researcher could have access to them. Publication dates were considered and the most recent documents fitting the above criteria were chosen. ‘The quality and appropriateness of the written material assessed is critical with respect to the validity of findings and their presentation’ (Wach & Ward, 2013, p. 9).

The texts were skeptically read to uncover underlying principles and influences. The comprehensiveness of the white papers should be evaluated; are they balanced, or do they weight on one side more than the other? (Bowen, 2009). Themes emerged out of this analysis. The examination of content, meaning and relevance is a central aspect to qualitative discourse analysis. It is significantly different from quantitative discourse analysis which uses a search for keywords as a methodology (Wach & Ward, 2013, p. 9). Following this step the researcher loosely coded the material by assigning keys to types of contents in different sections of the documents’ text. Thematic analysis can be useful when analyzing documents. One can code and categorize data based on characters to uncover themes within a white paper (Bowen, 2009). ‘Qualitative discourse analysis involves emergent coding, that is, the identification of relevant terms and topics upon reviewing a number of items’ (Altheide & Schneider, 2012, p. 292); followed by a constant comparison to clarify themes, frames and discourse.

The researcher then in accordance with Gill (2000) analyzed the data to form tentative hypotheses. The last step before drafting text was to check the reliability and validity of the research. This can be done through ‘(a) deviant case analysis; (b) participants understanding, and (c) analysis of coherence’ (p. 189). Only the latter of these related to this research step and (c) was therefore practiced.

Bowen (2009) perceives many advantages of using discourse analysis. It is efficient in terms of cost and time in that the researcher can select data as opposed to data collection. Most documents are easily available in the public domain, and can be attainable without

permission. Documents are non-reactive and stable, which means they are available to other researchers for further interrogation as the research process does not alter the integrity of a document. Tesch (1990) states that when exploring language in social sciences it is viewed as communication. It can be analyzed as a system of cultural knowledge or text can be used as data. In the case of this research, text will be used as data.

### **2.4.3 Critique of Discourse Analysis**

Reed (2000) argues that discourses should be explored in tandem with the power relationships that are responsible for creating discourses. It should also be examined in terms of the way it works through, and within existing structures. ‘Discourse is too frequently used in a vague and incoherent way and functions as a smokescreen for an unclear and ambivalent view on language’ (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000, p. 1145). The dilemma at present for discourse analysis, is the anti-realist disposition of many discourse analysis researchers. This has been a source of debate according to Bryman (2012) ‘because the emphasis on representational practices through discourse side-lines any notion of a pre-existing material reality that can constrain individual agency’ (p. 539). The lack of attention to an outside reality underpins discourse. However, the researcher is analyzing a reality, thus the disenfranchising of which may prove problematic.

## **2.5 Ethical Considerations**

This study has to adhere to ethical consideration pertaining to reliability and validity standards.

### **2.5.1 Reliability**

Reliability is a traditional concept within experimental research. It refers to the certainty of which one's measures are consistent. 'It is concerned with the question of the extent to which one's findings will be found again' (Merriam, 1995, p. 55). Within qualitative research the reliability of the research relates to the way in which the findings of an investigation should reflect the data collected (Ibid). In essence, does the study do what it is supposed to? To strengthen reliability the researcher employed triangulation, which according to Merriam (1995) is the use of multiple researchers, methods of research or sources of data. This master's thesis used multiple data in the form of government sources, NGOs reports and academic literature to critically evaluate the programs outlined within the white papers. The use of various sources breeds credibility (Bowen, 2009). Merriam (1995) proposed two other techniques to strengthen the reliability. These included peer examination and audit trails, however, these are not applicable to this research; see Merriam (1995) for a further discussion on these.

### **2.5.2 Validity**

Validity is made up of internal validity and external validity. It is concerned with a measure, and if it is measuring what it is intended to measure (Drost, 2011). Merriam (1995) argues that internal validity is not something that is just applicable to quantitative research. A qualitative researcher can take precautions though which their validity can be strengthened.

Two of these are related to this research; the first being triangulation; as previously mentioned in section 2.5.1 on the previous page. The second precaution is to provide a statement at the beginning of the research which states biases and assumptions, which was presented in the beginning of this chapter.

External Validity refers to ‘the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to other situations’ (Merriam, 1995, p. 57). In short the ability to generalize your research findings further than the perimeters of your research area. Within qualitative research one does not randomly sample the units of analysis, therefore one cannot generalize their findings to a whole population. Qualitative research uses mostly non probability sampling. This is also referred to as purposive or purposeful or criterion based sampling. The units of analysis are not selected on a random basis, but were purposively chosen so that they were of relevance to the research question and could provide the richest and most descriptive data (Altheide & Schneider, 2012).

In the case of this research the findings can only apply to the white papers analyzed in the course of this study and the findings cannot be generalized to other countries in the OECD, EU or globally. ‘The goal of qualitative research, after all, is to understand the particulars in depth, rather than finding out what is generally true of many’ (Ibid, p. 58). Nevertheless, Altheide & Schneider (2012) claim that although generalization is not the primary goal, it can be accomplished if appropriate sampling strategies are used.

## 2.6 Conclusion

To conclude, this research is carried out through qualitative discourse analysis which consists of examining a text in order to make sense of its contents as opposed to quantitative discourse analysis which carries out a precoded word search on documents. Protocols for qualitative discourse analysis tend to be less precise and fairly short, often having a dozen or fewer categories. It emphasizes the underlying meanings, patterns, and processes and how the white papers are framed, which may set a context for discussing adult education (Altheide & Schneider, 2012).

Qualitative discourse analysis is normally executed through an inductive approach however this research does contain some deductive characteristics such as searching for certain themes within the text. Due to time constraints, the researcher followed a deductive process by developing research questions and choosing the required analytical frameworks before going to the field.

Through the operationalization of the Bray and Thomas Cube, the thesis will make comparisons on three levels. In terms of region, it compares at the country level. It focuses on adults within the demographic level of comparison, and the aspects of education that will be analyzed are at the political change level in the form of white papers.

The choice of research design is discourse analysis, through which the policies are inspected using Scott's criteria (2014), and following Gill (2000) steps as close as the research will allow. Through skeptical reading the policies are analyzed to uncover guiding principles and influences from multinational organizations relating to the research questions, mainly the OECD and the EU.

The research, in order to strengthen reliability and validity looked outside the policies to NGOs and academic sources through a system of purposive sampling, as recommended by

Merriam (2002). The precautions taken as explained in this chapter will help the researcher to understand how language is used to explain and create the social world. In this instance the white papers will go some ways to build and maintain the infrastructure for adult education systems in both Ireland and Norway.

# 3 Introduction to Analytical Frameworks

An analytical framework is a theory used to guide research. In this case the researcher will use three analytical frameworks, which will operate as lens through which the white papers will be analyzed. By so doing, one can reach conclusions which may go some way in answering the research questions. The first two analytical frameworks that will be explained in this chapter in terms of origin, critique and application are social capital theory and human capital theory. The researcher will use them to assess the underlying principles of the documents, which pertains to research question 2; what are the dominant principles within both the Irish and Norwegian adult education white papers?

The final analytical framework that will be discussed also in terms of origin, application and critique, is world society theory. This tool will be used to aid the researcher in evaluating the influences of the OECD and EU in the white papers. It will prove useful in answering the first research question which is; what dimensions of Irish and Norwegian adult education policies are subject to the influence of the OECD and EU?

## 3.1 Social Capital Theory

Social capital as a policy concept is very young, as is its intellectual lineage (Schuller, 2001). Its rapid growth has allowed a diversity of approaches (Schuller, Baron & Field, 2000) from history to economics to national and international policy discourse (Kilpatrick, Field & Falk, 2003). It is a flexible concept, so widely utilized that it may seem to lose its integrity and is vulnerable to simplistic application (Schuller, 2001). Analysis using social capital moves the focus away from the individual and onto relations between actors, social units and institutions. It focuses on the community and can counter the concerns for society becoming too individualistic (Schuller, Baron & Field, 2000). Three authors are credited with the



creation of the social capital concept as we have it today; Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam, whom will be discussed in the following sections.

### **3.1.1 Bourdieu.**

Bourdieu was the first to use the term social capital (Kilpatrick, Field & Falk, 2003). He argues that capital can materialize in three fundamental guises; economic, cultural and social. For the purpose of this research, social capital will be the main focus. A risk of dealing with social capital is that there is no clearly agreed definition. Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as ‘the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition’ (p. 88).

The relationships between members of the network can be maintained by practical, symbolic or material exchanges, and ‘can secure material or symbolic profit’ (Ibid, p. 89). Social capital is made up of obligations or connections among actors which are partly convertible into economic capital. Bourdieu argues that social capital is not reducible to cultural or economic capital; nor is it independent of them. Rather it acts as a multiplier (Ibid).

### **3.1.2 Critique of Bourdieu.**

Bourdieu's use of the concept social capital, as argued by Schuller et al (2000), remains underdeveloped. He does not offer sufficient explanation of what is meant by the term social capital. Consequently his interpretation is intangible and persistently difficult to operationalize. It is used metaphorically rather than being an analytically disciplined concept (Ibid). Bourdieu's work was important in creating the social capital field of study. However, the difficulty in operationalizing the concept makes the ‘important theoretical corpus appear

ill-founded' (Ibid, p.5). The discrepancy between weak empirical data and complex theoretical claims is remarkable.

### **3.1.3 Coleman**

Coleman (1994) located the concept of social capital broadly within a neo-functionalist theoretical framework, defining it in functional terms as; a 'set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organization and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person' (p. 300).

He employed social capital to explain the higher than expected grades of children from the lower socio-economic echelon of society who attend Catholic schools. 'Children from poorer and less educated families were much less likely to complete high school and college than were children from better-off families' (Becker, 2011, p. xii). However, Coleman's participants lived in an environment where they were expected to achieve high grades. Thus they enjoyed higher than expected academic results in relation to other children in a similar socio-economic bracket. The schools promoted a sense of worth for the pupils. They united the home and school life of the children under the umbrella of faith, creating a tighter knit community. Thus Coleman gives great weight to the 'closure' of social structure in a bid to strengthen social structures (Coleman, 1988).

He demonstrated that low levels of human and cultural capital could be counterbalanced by high levels of social capital. Thus one could argue that social capital could be interpreted as a multiplier in the production of human capital in accordance with Bourdieu<sup>1</sup>. However Bourdieu sees social capital as reinforcing inequalities, whereas Coleman does not (Schuller et al., 2000).

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<sup>1</sup> It is worthy of note that Coleman never referred to Bourdieu in his work although they knew one another.

Coleman has the largest influence in the debate of social capital in the realm of education (Schuller et al., 2000). His work presents a ‘communal and value-dependent counterweight to the individualism and narrow instrumentalism of human capital theory’ (Ibid, p. 245). Becker in his book; *Human Capital* (1964) acknowledged the role of the family in influencing investment in education and other forms of human capital. Becker (2011) stated that he ‘paid little systematic attention to the links between these investments and the family’ (p. xii). Coleman presents the case that social capital has an important additional influence for the transfer of human capital from parents to children. The use of social capital as a tool for analyzing underachievement draws attention to the significance of school culture and family networks (Munn, 2000). Coleman’s case study highlighted that social capital both within and outside the family and ‘in the adult community surrounding the school, showed evidence of considerable value in reducing the probability of dropping out of high school’ (Coleman, 1988, p. 119). Leaving school before completion is a problem for both Ireland and Norway; and is pervasive in most OECD countries. The use of social capital to counteract ESL rates will be dealt with further within the course of this research. Coleman is an important reference within this context.

### **3.1.4 Critique of Coleman**

Coleman has been widely criticized. Portes (2000) identified a number of weaknesses in his work; one being that Coleman used an ambiguous definition that ‘opened the way for re-labelling a number of different and even contradictory processes as social capital’ (p. 5). Portes advocates a clear division between social structures that could be defined as social capital, and the assets one acquires through participation in said social structures. ‘Coleman focused largely on such matters as kinship and neighborhood’ (Schuller et al., 2000, p.7). Field, Schuller & Baron (2000) argued that he disregarded constructed social

organization as a source of social capital, focusing on the family unit. However his research focused on schools which are constructed social organizations, as are religious congregations through which the school was run.

### **3.1.5 Putnam**

Putnam (1996) defines social capital as; ‘features of social life - networks, norms, and trust - that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives’ (p. 56).

Putnam & Helliwell (2007) concluded that education levels in America were related to levels of civic participation. They stated that they were confident that ‘rising general levels of education are likely to be accompanied by higher general levels of political and social engagement’ (Ibid, p. 14). This view is corroborated within a European context. The 2006 EU document ‘*Adult Learning, it is never too late to learn*’ states that;

*‘improvements in adult learning are a considerable advantage for both individuals and society. Raising overall skills levels helps to improve economic indicators, such as productivity and unemployment, and social indicators, such as civic participation, criminality and healthcare costs’*  
(EU, 2006).

However Putnam does note that while education saw a dramatic increase, a similar level of expansion in social and political participation was not witnessed. Putnam’s studies in 1995 and 2000 observed that civic participation had actually fallen. Therefore one could conclude that variables other than education are at play, which may influence a nation's level of civic participation. Correlation need not show causation.

### **3.1.6 Critique of Putnam.**

Both Coleman and Putnam have been ‘criticized for functionalism and for failing to address issues of power and conflict’ (Schuller et al., 2000, p.10). Putnam rejects this, and has made claims that there is an intrinsic link between social capital and policies promoting equality. He views social capital as being unsustainable within societies with high levels of inequality. Putnam's understanding of social capital is broader than Coleman's. He overwhelmingly concludes that ‘social capital serves the common good, ignoring the possibility of social capital being used by one group or individual at the expense of others’ (Field et al., 2000, p. 247). Although Putnam does admit that social capital can have negative consequences both internally for the members of the network and externally for society (Schuller et al., 2000). Oklahoma bomber, Timothy McVeigh, is a case in point. Rather than going bowling alone, he went bowling with his associates. He used those social gatherings to cultivate his plan to plant a bomb in Oklahoma, USA, which killed 168 people in 1995 (Ibid, 2000). Also cited as examples of negative social capital are racist and Mafia organizations. Putnam acknowledges that people may have high trust levels and be socially inactive or antisocial. Therefore social capital has the potential for corrupt and discriminatory functions, and can be a resource for action which does not benefit the community at large.

### **3.1.7 Networks**

Schuller et al. (2000) state that trust and networks have overwhelmingly taken center stage in terms of defining Social Capital. Castells (1996) provides a definition of networks which proves useful. He defines networks as interconnected nodes. They are

*‘open structures, able to expand without limits, integrating new nodes as long as they share the same communication codes for example, values or performance goals’ (p, 470).*

Networks can constitute an organization of teachers or government ministers, or students.

Social capital focuses on relationships within and between networks ‘and the norms which govern these relationships’ (Schuller, 2001, p. 5).

Networks can assist in the exchange of information skills and ideas which can enable it to function with greater efficiency and more readily adapt to changing circumstances (Field et al, 2000). However, networks can also act against social cohesion (Schuller, 2001) as previously mentioned in section 3.1.6

### **3.1.8 Trust**

Social Capital draws attention to values within relationships, such as trust. The level of which can play a role in shaping behavior and attitudes (Schuller et al., 2000) and is reciprocal in nature. The functional use of social capital is demonstrated in Coleman’s example of the Jewish New York diamond traders who, in order to do business, exhibited shared trust and norms. A diamond dealer gives hundreds and thousands of dollars’ worth of diamonds to another diamond dealer for an expert appraisal. This is done without a contract, thus speeding up the process of business. The dense social networks of the Jewish New York diamond traders function as a sanctioning system. Those who break the rules are excluded from the network. In this instance trust translated into financial capital. Putnam & Helliwell (2007)

argue that high levels of trust can reduce the cost of ‘getting things done’. The absence of trust employs cumbersome systems such as insurance.

### **3.1.9 Bridging and Bonding Ties**

The origin of bonding and bridging ties within social capital lies with Putnam (2001).

Bonding ties are strong ties; ones that could be found within the family network for example.

‘Bonding social capital refers to the links between like-minded people, or the reinforcement of homogeneity’ (Schuller et al., 2000, p.10), and the exclusion of those who do not qualify.

They can promote information and skills sharing, within the boundaries of a defined network.

Strong ties can also have a dysfunctional element ‘excluding information and reducing capacity for innovation (Granovetter, 1973).

On the other hand a network can contain bridging ties which are weaker ties. This refers to the building and maintaining of ‘connections between heterogeneous groups; these are likely to be more fragile, but more likely also to foster social inclusion’ (Schuller et al., 2000, p.10).

These weaker ties could be more effective than close ties in providing new knowledge and resources, and can complement close bonding ties (Kilpatrick, Field & Falk, 2003).

### **3.1.10 Norms**

Norms are functions within networks, which can be constructed to ‘fulfil the interests and values of those in power’ (Castells, 2011a, p. 773). They facilitate the flow of information which is an essential function of a network (Schuller et al., 2000). Putnam states that networks and norms may be used for mutual or collective benefit, while Coleman stresses the benefits for the individual (Kilpatrick, Field & Falk, 2003). ‘Norms that accept diversity and inclusion as elements of social capital’ (Ibid, p. 422) can be important in community development. However norms can also reduce innovativeness (Coleman, 1988).

Coleman stresses the role of social capital in transmitting norms and in socially regulating the enforcement of such norms, for example, school completion and taking school work seriously as seen in a discussion of Coleman in section 3.1.3.

### **3.1.11 Social Capital in policy**

A merit of social capital is that it refocuses educational policy discourse on values such as trust; it generates questions concerning assumptions on human behavior (Schuller et al., 2000). It helped to ‘inset a longer-term perspective into policy-making’ (Ibid, p. 10) as it is not something that can be developed instantly. Its creation or erosion may take several years (Schuller, 2001).

Social capital can focus its attention on three dimensions of state institutions. Firstly the devolution of power downwards, in a European context, this can come in the form of subsidiaries. Secondly is the need to link different sectors; for example joining up policy fields in health and education. Third is the dispersion of decision making from state organs to community and voluntary bodies’ (Schuller et al., 2000, p. 34). The researcher will operationalize these concepts when analyzing the policies to uncover the utilization of social capital in the adult education policies under review.

The current revival of social capital in political discourse could be viewed as an attempt to re-establish a social dimension into capitalism (Schuller et al., 2000). It has emerged as an idea at a time when policy makers are particularly interested in making schools more effective and when educational sociologists are continuing to seek ways of explaining the connections between schools and society (Munn, 2000). Munn (2000) warns that social capital allows the state to excuse itself from such responsibility as the provision of welfare. The school may be seen as a vehicle for combating social and economic problems. She argues that education



should indeed be part of the solution, but warns against presenting adult education as a 'one size fits all' answer to society's social and economic ills.

### **3.1.12 Generating Social Capital**

Coleman (1988) regards the creation of social capital as an unintentional process and emanates from other activities. If social capital is a by-product of other activities, it follows that very little real investment will be devoted to directly create social capital (Schuller et al., 2000). The actors who generate it secure only some of the benefits, which leads to underinvestment in social capital production (Coleman, 1988).

Coleman (1988) argues that an organization may facilitate the construction of social capital through inadvertent means. An example of which could be an adult education centre. Putnam & Helliwell (2007) argue that social capital can be generated through education. They found that levels of trust increase with each additional year of education. The Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) shows that adult with low levels of literacy also reported poor health and had less trust in others. However one could argue that there is more to people's poor health and lack of trust than literacy skills. It is logical that a number of factors are at play. Nevertheless, Field et al. (2000) suggest that 'access to new knowledge and skills can help build, and transform, social capital' (p. 244). The researcher will use social capital as an analytical tool to uncover ways in which both the Irish and Norwegian adult education white papers propose to generate social capital within their perspective societies.

### **3.1.13 Critique of Social Capital**

There is much debate concerning social capital; what it contains, how to measure the contents, and whether it should be considered ‘capital’ in the first place. Schuller (2001) argues that from the point of view of policy analysis its breadth of focus may prove to be a disadvantage. However, breadth can also prove necessary as it transcends exclusively economic reasoning for skills policies.

Given the lack of specificity and clarity in the definition of social capital, measurement is also a source of confusion. This impinges on the validity of the measurements (Schuller, et al., 2000). Human and physical capital can be calculated with measures that remain constant across different contexts, unlike social capital which is context bound (Ibid). It is grounded in concepts such as trust, norms and networks and ‘non-economic returns are often vaguely understood’ (Panitsidou, Griva & Chostelidou, 2012, p 551) because they tend to be highly abstract.

Policy makers latched onto human capital theory because it was easy to measure. If social capital were reduced to a limited number of numerical indicators, this may be disadvantageous to the concept. It may become another variable in econometric equations.

The ambiguity around the measurement of social capital may be an obstacle to its longevity. More needs to be done on its validity before it is used as a precise analytical tool. However, Schuller et al. (2000) argue that ‘that is not a reason for denying its validity’ (p. 29).

Social Capital is also criticized for its circularity, for being both an explanation and a descriptor of social cohesion, both cause and effect. It could be an instrument, outcome or a requirement of a flourishing society (Schuller et al., 2000; Portes, 2000). Portes calls for a distinction to be made between processes, sources and resources claimed from social capital, in order to avoid repetition of the concepts. Schuller et al. (2000) state that ‘many of the problems inhere not so much in social capital but in the complex and multifaceted nature of

social reality' (p.24). They urge on the side of caution; however one should not dismiss it entirely as an empty vessel.

## **3.2 Human Capital Theory**

Human capital theory was propagated in the 1960s. Human capital theory views education mainly in terms of its economic value. Skills and knowledge are a form of capital. Through improved skills and knowledge 'the quality of human effort can be greatly improved and its productivity enhanced' (Schultz, 1961, p. 1). Through the lens of human capital theory, education becomes an economic device, which has set the framework for government policies and education reforms since its inception.

### **3.2.1 Human Capital Theory in Education**

The creation of the concept of human capital theory was mainly the endeavor of T.W. Schultz and Gary. S. Becker, along with Jacob Mincer, Sherwin Rosen (Becker, 2011). They calculated the rates of return on human capital to be higher than for investment in physical capital such as infrastructure, industry or agriculture; thus significantly changing the role and perception of education. Schultz (1961) argues that; 'if we were to treat education as pure investment this result would suggest that the return to education were relatively more attractive than those to nonhuman capital' (p. 10).

Human capital is defined as 'individuals and societies acquiring knowledge, skill, and information by spending money and time on schooling, job training, health, and other investments' (Becker, 2011, p. xi). Schultz (1961) states that 'by investing in themselves, people can enlarge the range of choice available to them' (p. 2). Human capital is an important factor and a competitive advantage within a knowledge-led global economy

(Boutin, Chinien, Moratis, & van Baalen, 2009). A well educated workforce is seen as the key to economic competitiveness, thereby creating prosperity.

Education results are measurable, and therefore suitable for empirical analysis. Thus since the 1960s the notion of economics has dominated the policy discourse on education in a global and national context. According to Arnove, Franz & Torres (2013) public expenditures on 'education would produce net social benefits, increasing the amount of wealth in a society and improving its distribution' (p.150).

Schultz (1961) makes the argument that 'tax laws everywhere discriminate against human capital' (p. 13). He argues that human capital is reproducible, it can decrease or become obsolete, and therefore it requires maintenance. He further argued in 1961 that 'our laws are all but blind to these matters' (Ibid). However this is no longer the case in the EU and OECD countries where tax laws incentivize employers to invest in their employees skill set. This may in part be due to the success of human capital theory in policy and may also be due to a growing need for education and skills within a knowledge society.

Human capital is mostly applicable in education. However, expenditure in health is also a crucial form of human capital, as well as food and shelter (Becker, 2011). Schultz (1961) states that the five most important pursuits that improve human capabilities range from health to migration for employment. Two of the five pursuits concern adult education. The first is in the form of on-the-job training organized by a firm. In a modern day context there has been a change in employment relationships, and a decline in lifetime employment, which affects investment in human capital (Schuller, 2001). Firms are reluctant to invest in employees because the labor market is quite fluid (Ibid). Nevertheless most of those engaged in education are in employment as will be further explored in section 5.14.1.

Schultz also advocates training which occurs outside the firm. In recent times this area has witnessed an expansion. In the field of further education and training for adults the links between the economy and education are the clearest and most direct within OECD countries (Psacharopoulos, 1994). Human capital calculations justify attention to a ‘variety of courses offered in adult education programs’ (Becker, 2011, p. xi). Becker (2011) states that an important aspect of this expansion is due to new technologies, and an increased demand for college graduates proficient in them. The increase of the importance of knowledge and skills within the modern economy means that ‘human capital and education will be even more important in the future than it has been during the past 50 years’ (Ibid, p. xiv).

### **3.2.2 Human Capital Theory in Policy**

Human capital formulations are important as rationales for education (Singh, 2009). ‘It allows expenditure on learning to be classified as an investment’ (Schuller, 2001, p. 11) with both costs and returns. Positive returns are measured by an increase in income that is greater than the cost of schooling. The costs included tuition fees and other direct expenses as well as monies that were conceded through being in school rather than work (Becker, 2011).

Policy makers have sought to understand and measure human capital in the way that physical capital improvements and investments can be understood. This may prove to be problematic if social actors are considered only in terms of their monetary value within the market economy (NALA, 2011). A value is placed on their contribution, which ‘could result in a system that deems some people to be a costly investment with unlikely pay-offs’ (Tett, 2014, p. 21). The economy has a social context which Schuller (2001) argues should not be ignored. It is based on people, therefore it benefits when people are in solid relations with each other.

### **3.2.3 Critique of HCT**

The view of human capital theory as a tool for measuring returns on education, in the same way that one would measure stocks and bonds, is open to criticism. 'More complex processes are at work, with multiple interactions between different social factors' (Field et al., 2000, p. 243).

Bourdieu (1986) argues that the scope of investigation into capital, as carried out by economists, is limited to the monetary part of capital, and does not incorporate capital that can be acquired as a result of social networks. Social networks can be a source of capital that can morph into monetary value. He argues that economists such as Becker see non-economic capital as disinteresting. Munn (2000) argues that a trend within human capital theory which focuses on educational attainment tends to lay accountability for success and failure at an individual level and ignore structural explanations of disadvantage.

### **3.2.4 Differences in Attributes of Human and Social Capital**

Competition and collaboration characterize human and social capital respectively (Schuller, 2001). Human and social capital are in a relationship of tension, theoretically and pragmatically' (Field et al., 2000, p. 250), but they are not in opposition to one another. Social capital is not an alternative policy instrument, but rather underpins or complements human capital (Schuller, 2001). Both are related but 'not in a linear or non-causal manner' (Field et al., 2000, p. 261).

The different attributes of human and social capital are demonstrated in table 1 below.

Table 1; Differences in Attributes of Human and Social Capital

	Human Capital	Social Capital
Focus	Individual	Relationships
Measures	Duration Qualifications	Membership/Participations Trust levels.
Outcomes	Direct: Income, Productivity Indirect: Health, Civic Activity	Social Cohesion Economic Achievement Moral Social Capital.
Model	Linear	Interactive/Circular
Policy	Up-skilling, Accessibility, and Rates of Return.	Citizenship, Capacity-Building, and Empowerment.

(Field et al., 2000, p. 250).

The focus of human capital is on the individual. The individual improves skills and thereby also future wages. However this investment could also be seen outside the individual as argued by Schuller (2001), who states ‘investment in knowledge and skills brings economic returns, individually and therefore collectively’ (p. 5). Social capital, on the other hand focuses on relationships. The trust and norms within those relationships or networks are key concepts of social capital, which, depending on its contexts, can be for the public good or can act against it. Coleman (1988) explains human capital as a change that takes place within the individual, on the other hand social capital is a change that takes place *among* people and which facilitates action.

Human capital is measured on the duration of education or the amount of qualifications obtained, as is the practice of economists who are the main users of the concept. Educators have a much wider view of the use of education. Economists prefer measurable variables that

can be used in equations. This does not mean that they may not acknowledge the wider value that is transmitted through education.

Social capital measurements on the other hand are less formalized, and are ‘measured broadly by levels of active participation in civic life or in other networks’ (Field et al., p. 251). The outcomes of social capital can be linked to economic development, but it also has wider implications, ‘including social cohesion and generating further social capital’ (Ibid). The outcomes of human capital are mainly direct, and based in monetary value on what one receives in terms of wage increase from investment in education or health.

The model of human capital is linear in nature. If one invests time and or money into education, returns will follow. Social capital on the other hand is less linearly causal in orientation. It is circular, in that its returns are broad and not easily definable, and for example elements such as trust are seen as both cause and effect of social capital. ‘Values and relationships are not easily measurable, nor are changes in them easily benchmarked and monitored’ (Schuller, 2001, p. 12). Social capital is context bound and may look different at local level and macro level, also making it difficult to measure; therefore it is open to criticism. However, Schuller (2001, p. 10) argues context dependence does not mean that it is meaningless.

Human capital is visible within the white papers and has relatively straightforward implications. Although it can include social benefits, it has tended to be used in policy discourse as a justification for investment in skills training that has measurable outcomes. One could also present the argument that human capital generates ‘a public good’, therefore public investment in education could be justified. Economic benefits of education receive widespread political legitimacy of economic goals. Human capital theory is a convenient



argument for educational investment. In the competition for scarce resources, advocacy tends to put much emphasis on arguments that appear to win the widest endorsement.

Social capital theory in policy is less clear in this regard; indeed the returns from social capital may not be measurable. Many of the benefits pertain to groups and institutions rather than individuals. Investment for the creation of social capital 'may lie as much with governmental actors as with individuals and employers' (Field et al., 2000, p. 252).

The development of human capital and technological innovation are essential for prosperity. However, without the corresponding development of social capital, these skills cannot be shared or developed for the benefit of society (NALA, 2011). The OECD (2014d) state that people need both soft and hard skills in order to function in society, and succeed in the labor market. This helps them to 'contribute to better social outcomes and build more cohesive and tolerant societies' (p.21). Focusing on the increase of human capital alone does not ensure economic or social progress. The enhancement of human capital should be accompanied by the strengthening of social capital and social cohesion (Ibid).

### 3.3 World Society Theory

World society is approached from a macro phenomenological perspective which builds on sociological institutionalism. World society theory founder John W Meyer, argues that nation states are operating within a single system which consists of the cultural, social, political and economic relations. Countries bear remarkably similar traits within government policy and or organizational structure. Two core assumptions within world society theory are that of convergence of systems and consensus from nations (Carney, Rappleye and Silova, 2012).

‘Many features of the contemporary nation-state derive from worldwide models constructed and propagated through global cultural and associational processes’ (Meyer, Boli, Thomas & Ramirez, 1997, p. 145). World models such as equality, socio-economic progress and human development and civil international relations are highly rationalized and consensual. They ‘define and legitimize agendas for local action, shaping the structures and policies of nation-states’ (Ibid).

Meyer et al. (1997) defined the nation state as a rationalized actor. State’s interests are defined in universalistic terms, and they are expected and entitled to act in their interest. Nation states are ‘culturally constructed and embedded rather than unanalyzed rational actors’ (Ibid, p. 147). The culture is organized on a worldwide basis and ‘not simply built up from local circumstances and history’ (Ibid, p. 148). Thus nation states are exogenously constructed entities. Individuals inside and outside the state who are involved in policy formation are ‘enactors of scripts rather than they are self-directed actors’ (Ibid, p. 150). They are taking part in a symbolic process rather than a ‘calculation of interests assumed by rationalistic actor-centric approaches’ (Ibid, p. 151). Although states, organizations and individuals contribute to the structure and content of world culture, the influence of world society is emphasized.

The models of world society shape the nation states 'identities, structures, and behavior via worldwide cultural and associational process' (Ibid, p. 173) facilitated by rationalized others whose professional and scientific authority 'often exceeds their power and resources' (Ibid).

Meyer et al. (1997) examine nation states in terms of isomorphism, decoupling and expansive structuration as a result of exogenously driven construction. They argue that although states try to live up to the model of rational actor, they 'exhibit a great deal of isomorphism in their structures and policies' (Ibid, p. 152) which results in decoupling 'between purpose and structures, intention and result' (Ibid). Decoupling can manifest in the form of inconsistencies between the adopted model and local budgets, requirements or practices. Nation-states are modelled on an external culture that is difficult to import, therefore decoupling is endemic in world culture, whose models 'are highly idealized and internally inconsistent, making them in principle impossible to actualize' (Ibid, p. 154). The dependence on exogenous models, coupled with models that are not anchored in the local circumstances 'generates expansive structuration' (Ibid, p. 156), which refers to the formation and spread of 'explicit, rationalized, differentiated organizational forms' (Ibid).

Resource rich countries in the core who face exogenous pressure often have the resources and organizational capacity to adopt models. Weaker actors may 'emphasize formal structuration instead' (Meyer et al., 1997, p. 155) where reforms can be symbolic or represent a future objective such as an elaborate, unrealistic five-year plan. However,

*'if a specific nation-state is unable to put proper policies in place (because of cost, incompetence, or resistance), world society structures will provide help'*

(Ibid, p. 159).

In the case of the Irish system the EU provide funding through OMC, and the rationalized others of the OECD are often approached and offer to give advice on best practice.

### **3.3.1 The Rise of Rights**

The Breakdown of colonial system and the spread of norms of equality is a characteristic of world society theory. Nations possess economic and social rights that are remarkably similar, and ‘obligations to maintain economic progress and social justice are defined in uniform terms’ (Meyer, Boli-Bennett & Chase-Dunn, 1975, p. 228). The individual increased in status, and the empowered individual is celebrated within school curricula which are remarkably similar (Meyer, 2011). ‘The post-war world saw the striking rise in global principles of the human rights of the individual person’ (Meyer, 2010, p. 8). One of these rights being education which was enshrined in article 26 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 (Meyer, Ramirez & Soysal, 1992).

During the 1950s an educational revolution took place (Meyer, Ramirez, Rubinson, Boli-Bennett, 1977) following a massive wave of decolonization after World War II (WWII) (Chase-Dunn & Grimes, 1995). The number of independent nations in the world grew rapidly from 65 in 1940 to 142 in 1970.

Mass schooling is a central feature of Western culture, and it was part of the model of a nation state that was adopted by other newly independent countries after WWII. Meyer et al., (1977) examined the expansion of education systems, and concluded that ‘between 1950 and 1970, the expansion of national educational systems was universal’ (p. 245). It occurred across countries in similar ways regardless of social or economic variables (Meyer et al., 1992), and is a result and a characteristic of the contemporary world, one which affected all nation states at the same point in time (Meyer et al., 1977).

### **3.3.2 Critique of World Society Theory**

Carney et al. (2012) argue that the basis of world society theory, which is Meyers exploration of school expansion, is flawed due to the admission of missing data by Meyer et al., (1992) in their analysis of the ‘World Expansion of Mass Education, 1870-1970’. Carney et al. (2012) note that since the 1990s there has been a conceptual shift within world society research where the rationalized myths as introduced by Meyer et al. were replaced with ‘models’. They further state that ‘world society theorists do not question assumptions ‘of a universal preference among nation-state actors for the principles of market economies and democratic policies’ (Carney et al., 2012, p. 368), thus analysis takes place through a ‘particular and partial lens’ (p. 385). Carney et al. (2012) also state that ‘alternative explanations are not countenanced’ (p. 379) and the rejection of coercion as an explanation for convergence is not empirically supported. World society theorists construct a narrative of consensus framed in liberal capitalism while they do not engage with the growth of global conflict, inequality and poverty. Meyer on the other hand criticizes the social sciences for their ‘reluctance to acknowledge patterns of influence and conformity that cannot be explained solely as matters of power relations or functional rationality’ (Meyer et al., 1997, p. 145). His aim was to partially correct that and leaves the question of coercion open. However Carney et al. (2012) argues that he ignores coercion, stating that ‘the precise nature of individual cognition and reflection remains opaque, while processes of coercion or conflict in social action are avoided because of their apparently poor explanatory value’ (p. 369). By not allowing for the possibility of coercion cultural consensus becomes a possibility.

Carney et al. (2012) argue that the empirical analysis undertaken by world society theorists does not ‘support the claim of world culture but instead tend to produce them’ (p. 368), thus the concept of world society is imagined. They concluded that by disregarding factors other

than world culture they are upholding and supporting a system by normalizing discourse of global trends. World society theorists may be what Meyer refers to as the 'script writing Others of the world', who by generating scientific and professional discourse and not supporting their claims by empirical research, 'create the very image of consensus and homogeneity' (p. 366). However, world society analysis also has the potential to enhance the understanding of social change. It can promote collective rational action to avoid predictable disasters. This according to Chase-Dunn & Grimes (1995) 'is the most alluring aspect encouraging research in the area' (p. 414).

### **3.4 Conclusion**

To conclude the researcher will use each of the analytical frameworks as spectacles through which the white papers of both Norway and Ireland will be analyzed. Social and human capital theories will be used to explore the research question concerning the uncovering of dominant principles guiding the policies. The researcher will use social capital as an analytical tool to uncover ways in which both the Irish and Norwegian adult education white papers propose to generate social capital. An interrogation of the policies in the context of social capital will entail a search for concepts such as the strengthening of trust and norms as well as the creation and maintenance of networks. The researcher will use human capital theory to probe the use of language which argues for the promotion of skilling and re-skilling of adults for economic purposes. Also concepts such as tax incentives shall be investigated. Human capital theory also contains aspects of investment in health, nutrition and shelter. The white papers will be inspected in order to uncover their relevance or presence within the documents.

Globalization is not a new phenomenon. It has accelerated over the past two and a half decades, thus increasing the influence of supranational institutions in shaping social and economic development (Poschen, 2009). Therefore transnational organizations like the OECD and the EU have assumed leading roles (Tsatsaroni & Evans, 2013). Thus, the researcher will adopt the lens of world society theory to explore the research questions relating to the dimensions of Irish and Norwegian adult education white papers, which may be subject to the influence of the OECD and EU. World society will be used to explore outside influences in terms of the internationalization of norms. Meyer et al. (1997) states that ‘actors including nation states routinely organize and legitimize themselves in terms of universalistic (world) models like citizenship, socio-economic development and rationalized justice’ (p. 148). World culture consists of policies reflecting western ideas of liberal economics and civil rights (Carney et al., 2012) (Meyer et al., 1997).

The exogenous character of world culture means that states are marked by extensive decoupling and structuration. Thus the researcher will explore the white papers to uncover these concepts, in an attempt to prove or disprove the relevance of Meyer's world society in the cases of Ireland and Norway.

The final research question relates to the areas in which Irish and Norwegian adult education infrastructure have had favorable outcomes? Similarly, what are the areas in which they could improve? This question will be answered using various governmental and non-government reports to access the successes and shortcomings of each system.

# **4 An Introduction to the OECD and the EU in the Context of this Research**

A transition is taking place within most Western nation states, moving from being highly industrialized, to knowledge led economies (NALA, 2011). Adult education and skills have emerged as an important educational policy issue in the last twenty years. Many international and transnational organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank, OECD and EU have advocated policies that reflect the value of adult education (Rasmussen, 2009). National governments have followed suit; thus adult education is visible on government agendas (Ibid). This chapter contains an introduction to the OECD and the EU, and their role in formal adult education.

## **4.1 The OECD**

The OECD has 30 member states and collaborates with another 70 organizations and countries. It is an important meeting ground for governments, and has an extensive network of policy makers, researchers and consultants or what Meyer et al. (1997) refers to as rationalized others. The educational policies of the OECD have a lineage of over half a century. However since the 1990s their role has gained increased prominence (Moutsios, 2009). The scope of their involvement in international education policy-making encompasses preschool to adult education, and ranges from educational technology to school management. ‘Today, hardly any country related to the OECD ignores its data and recommendations on education’ (Ibid, p. 469). Holford, Milana, & Mohorčič Špolar (2014) argue that the influence of the OECD on lifelong learning, since the 1900s, is hard to avoid. The OECD has



the ability to pick up on widely accepted goals, and through cooperation with participating members, these mutual goals can be achieved.

In the OECD seven countries, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Japan, the United States and Canada, essentially the G8 countries minus Russia, equate to 80% of the funding for OECD activities. The USA alone pays 25%, while Japan pays 23% of the organization's funding. 'Financial inequality is translated to unequal balance of power in decision making regarding research and policy' (Moutsios, 2009, p. 471). Therefore one could argue that the direction of policy making within the OECD is determined by the states with the largest exchequer.

Adult Education is often criticized by educational researchers because it is dominated by the narrow notion of learning allegedly advocated by neoliberal based educational policies (Rasmussen, 2009). However within the OECD, countries are not bound to take on policy advice. It is a voluntary procedure. Meyer et al., (1975) mention 'world opinion' as an influence on internal affairs. Therefore a characteristic of world society is that countries follow each other's lead. The worldwide expansion of education, which occurred in the years following the 1950s, is given by Meyer et al. (1992) as an example of this phenomenon.

### 4.1.1 OECD Surveys

The OECD has been using comparable international statistics since the 1960s. In the 1970s the statistics moved to include educational performance indicators (Psacharopoulos, 1994). OECD surveys such as The Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (ALL) and the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) provide a comparative perspective for policy makers, and allow ‘monitoring of progress towards international standards’ (Tsatsaroni & Evans, 2013, p.173). This contributes to a comparative turn in policy making. Thus, ‘far from being simply descriptive, comparisons perform prescriptive and political functions’ (Ibid, p.169). A database of comparable data sets for educational indicators enables countries to compare their education systems and adjust their education policies to come in line with OECD standards (Ibid). One such example is Ireland's literacy campaign which will be discussed later in section 5.10.1.

The OECD can be interpreted as what Castells (2010) refers to as a network which exercises network power. Action within the network requires social coordination which is reached through standards. Network power is not exercised by exclusion, but rather through setting standards for inclusion. The OECD network is made up of the richest and most powerful countries in the world; many of whom are in what Meyer refers to as the core. In an effort to maintain their position they generate human capital to sustain their standing as providers of the most advanced technology and military innovations (Chase-Dunn & Grimes, 1995). They compete with other countries through standard tests which measure human capital, and efforts to improve said capital strengthen their position in a global knowledge-led economy. Although it is worth noting that the adult education policies in Norway and Ireland are

grounded in a concern for equity as well as focusing on economic competitiveness, as does the EU and OECD. These are mutually supportive rather than conflicting goals.

## **4.2 The EU**

The Maastricht Treaty, formerly called the Treaty of The European Union was signed in 1992. It came into existence because of a need to compete in part with the USA and Japan. ‘States increasingly engage in collective action to protect their economic and political interests’ (Meyer et al., 1975, p. 242). The EU is now one of the world’s most influential economic and political players. ‘It’s GDP in 2012 was slightly larger than that of the USA, and roughly twice that of the People’s Republic of China’ (Holford et al., 2014, p. 269).

Holford (2008) argues that lifelong learning emerged in the EU as ‘a means of achieving both competitiveness and social cohesion in an increasingly knowledge-based and globalized economy’ (p. 9). The EU and its member states have a remit for certain policies within education and training. However for lifelong learning and Vocational Education and Training (VET) this is not the case. Therefore member states maintain responsibility for legislation, policy development and implementation. The EU then ‘cannot mandate but has to find ‘softer’ policy tools’ (Coles & Leney, 2009, p. 414). One such soft tool is open method coordination (OMC), which is ‘a form of cooperation between governments, social partners and other European stakeholders’ (Ibid, p. 415). It is a means by which best practice is shared and EU goals are implemented through research and funding. ‘The open method of coordination enabled greater convergence towards EU goals, serving as a means to spread best practice and set guidelines and timetables for implementing policies’ (Panitsidou et al., 2012, p 549) in order to promote a coherent European education policy.

## **4.3 Conclusion**

The OECD and the EU, as multinational organizations, influence adult education policies or white papers through what Meyer et al. (1975) refer to as world culture. Both organizations, as networks, set standards either through international surveys, or through OMC. Nodes or countries within these networks voluntarily conform to standards in order to sustain acceptance within the network. This is what Castells (2010) refers to as network power. To unravel the process of international influence is difficult, and may vary from case to case. One of the aims of this research is to examine the Irish and Norwegian white papers in order to detect traces of influence from outside organizations within national adult education white papers, through the use of previously mentioned analytical frameworks.

# 5 Comparison of the Irish and Norwegian Adult Education White Papers

## 5.1 An Introduction to Norway

The long-term approach contained within policy and provision of adult education in the Nordic Countries has been cited as a main reason for their favorable literacy and numeracy levels (NALA, 2011). One could argue that alongside this, basic schooling in the formative years may also have consequences in terms of basic literacy and numeracy skills. Nordic countries enjoy high levels of participation in adult education among disadvantaged students. Social justice and equity are strong overarching aims within adult education policy (Ibid). In Norway for example, adult education is well developed, especially for economically inactive and unemployed people, the participation rate of which was at 56% (OECD average; 44%) in 2012, among the highest within OECD countries (OECD, 2014b). This aids the labor market to adapt quickly to the knowledge society in the age of post-industrialization. The Norwegian model due to its success is worthy of scrutiny. This thesis will focus on provision that is in place for those with low educational attainment in Norway. It will also explore initiatives aimed at reducing the rate of ESLs and thus reducing the educational disadvantage of the contemporary and future generations. The white paper that is the focus of this research is the *Education Act* with amendments made to facilitate the inclusion of adult education in 2014. The document pertains to the whole education system with a brief chapter on adult education, which is concerned with boosting the human capital of the population

through the right to free upper secondary education and education for people with disabilities, counselling and transport.

It is worthy to note that Norway released a later adult education white paper in February 2016 called '*fra utenforskap til ny sjanse*' (From Outsider to Second Chance). Unfortunately this document was not available in English, thus it could not be the focus of this research. Most of the thesis will concentrate on the system before February 2016 with slight commentary on what the government proposes to change within the new white paper.

### **5.1.1 An Introduction to Ireland**

Skills have become increasingly important due to technology developments which leave little room for the 'unskilled' worker (NMER, 2014a). Skills shortages provide a major barrier to the sustainable development of the economy. The Irish government recognizes that the promotion of adult education 'is increasingly moving to center stage throughout the developed world' (IDES, 2000, p. 26). New technology, increased competition, globalization, demographic change and a continued need to upskill the workforce are cited as reasons to organize and invest in adult education (Ibid, p. 127). A concern is presented throughout the white paper of 'keeping up' with developments in the industrialized world, with one such development being that of adult education as part of a lifelong learning approach to education.

Ireland's white paper, '*Learning for Life*', was released in 2000. It is a proposal by the Irish Department of Education and Skills (IDES) which followed on from the green paper entitled '*Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning*' in 1998. The white paper set out a context for, and made recommendations on how the sector might function and evolve (Ibid, p.9).

Adult education is defined by the white paper as ‘systematic learning undertaken by adults who return to learning having concluded initial education or training’ (Ibid, p. 27). This includes adults who return to education either at second or third level. It also incorporates learning in either informal or formal settings. The definition is incomplete however and leaves many questions unanswered, such as what is informal systematic learning? One could presume that systematic formal learning takes place in a classroom adhering to modularized timetables set out by the formal setting in which one attends. However the white paper also refers to systematic learning within an informal setting. In this case a series of interviews could benefit the research, however, this was not achievable due to time constraints.

The white paper was released at a time of economic prosperity before the 2008 economic crash. It is the first and only Irish white paper relating to adult education; nevertheless it was not the first time that adult education was highlighted as an area that needed attention. Within the Report of the Commission on Adult Education (1984, cited in IDES, 2000) lifelong learning was a significant theme. Little provision was made at that time to make it a reality due to the financial crisis of the mid-1980s and the expanding youth population (Ibid). The OECD (1991, cited in IDES, 2000) concluded that in Ireland as in other countries, ‘there is no evidence of any concerted efforts to render it a reality’ (p. 54). That was until the previously mentioned green paper. This thesis shall explore the reasons that adult education was made a policy concern in 2000 as opposed to when it was highlighted in a national report in 1984.

## **5.2 The Development of the White Papers**

In the Norwegian white paper, the process of its development was not discussed, however the Irish white paper dealt with its materialization process in great detail. In Ireland consultation with a wide range of stakeholders is an important element of white paper formation.

Approximately seventy groups or networks engaged in individual meetings with the Irish Department of Education and Skills. Policy makers, researchers, funders, providers and users of adult education were invited, along with social partners and the community and voluntary sectors, to give their contribution (IDES, 2000).

Social capital was generated through the consultation process, in that stakeholders came together to form a network with shared visions and goals. Each group of stakeholders are in themselves a network. Networks can interact with other networks ‘in a shared process of network making’ (Castells, 2011b, p. 781) which the government facilitated. This is what Castells (2011a) refers to as network making power, which is the ability to set up and reprogram a network. The programmers in this instance are the Irish and Norwegian governments. When politicians come to office, they are programmers of political process within their respective countries (Ibid).

## **5.3 Influences on the Norwegian White Paper**

In the bounds of the Norwegian white paper the influences were not overtly described as they were in the Irish white paper. However, similarities between the two systems are prevalent.

Meyer et al. (1997) argues that countries are developing along the same lines and incorporating liberal Western ideals of economic and social cohesion into their government policies regardless of suitability to the country context. Social cohesion and economic prosperity are at the root policy aims of the Irish and Norwegian documents. They are both



concerned with promoting equity and economic progress which are goals not only of the governments but also of the OECD and the EU, along with a concern for promoting lifelong learning through adult education. One could argue that the Western world is witnessing an expansion of adult education along the similar lines that Meyer (1977) explains the expansion of primary education post WWII. Education is standardizing throughout the world. There is a rise in lifelong learning (Meyer, 2010), and the expansion of education may reflect the value of development within a contemporary context (Meyer et al., 1977). Mass schooling is a central feature of Western culture, and formally organized adult education was the last area of mass education to be developed in Ireland. Meyer's et al. (1977) explanation for the concurrent expansion of education systems lies on the assumption that various countries experience a shared cultural and organizational environments and inhabit a common international social system.

## **5.4 Influences on the Irish White Paper**

There are many policies which influence the Irish white paper both from within the government, and from non-government organizations. Meyer et al. (1997) argues that if policy change does not happen organically, a function of world society will provide advice through rationalized others or funding so that the country can initiate change. If a specific nation is unable or unwilling to initiate policy change either due to resistance, incompetence or cost concerns, the structures of world society will provide the needed assistance.

This section will focus on the EU and OECD, as mentioned in the Irish white paper; the first of which being a national report with an EU backdrop called the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) (1997). It outlined the need for adult education provision and sets a number of goals to be achieved by 2007 in line with the European Anti-Poverty Network. This could be interpreted as Open Method Coordination (OMC) or soft law where guidelines and

timetables are set in order to implement policy and achieve EU goals. NAPS emphasized the role education could play in reducing poverty and disadvantage, mainly with regards to community education opportunities, early school leavers (ESLs) and second chance education. It also highlighted the need for the development of an integrated guidance and counselling service in education and employment (IDES, 2000). Each of these points are concerned with equity and were tackled within the course of the white paper.

The EU was specified as an influence in the creation of the document. Lifelong learning was first mentioned in the 1970s as a vehicle through which a united European citizenship could be achieved (Panitsidou et al., 2012, p. 548). It is now a key element of the EU (Holford et al., 2007) who marked 1996 as the '*Year of Lifelong Learning*' which focused on issues such as the transition between place of work and place of education; progression; accreditation and tutor training (IDES, 2000). Economic progress was a primary concern in this facet and each of these issues were addressed within the white paper.

The OECD document '*Lifelong Learning for All*' (1996) was also highlighted as an influence within the Irish white paper. It 'drew attention to the role of educational institutions, in promoting lifelong learning (IDES, 2000). The white paper also stated that the OECD's International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) (1997) drew attention to the high rates of illiteracy, and the budget deficit within literacy services. Thus it was elevated to center stage in the white paper as a direct result of the OECD survey. The IALS placed Ireland in second last position in terms of literacy competencies. These said documents, as well as national concerns, were cited as the impetus for change.

## 5.5 Structures of Norway's Adult Education

Decision making within the Norwegian education system is decentralized. The central government set goals, and the obligation for development and implementation lies at the local rather than national level (OECD, 2014d). The adult education system under the 2014 white paper for training adults was 'confusing, with responsibility being split between various ministries, directorates and levels of government' (NMER, 2014b) as stated on the Norwegian government website. According to the OECD (2014d) difficulties in coordinating 'a whole of government approach' on financing skills policies often leads policies being developed in separate institutional 'pillars' or 'silos'. 'This can lead to confusion and undermine the efficiency with which skills challenges are addressed' (Ibid, p. 137) and 'can lead to suboptimal outcomes for the individual users of the system at local and regional level' (Ibid, p. 138). Although the 2014 white paper did not attempt to rectify this, the 2016 white paper does advocate an integrated policy response 'ensuring that individuals have the skills that can form the basis for a stable and lasting labor market' (NMER, 2014a). Thus a concern for the development of human capital is presented, although the same concern for the development of skills was not evident within the bounds of the 2014 white paper.

The following organizations are responsible for different aspects of the Norwegian adult education system. The Ministry of Labor and the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (NAV) is responsible for the training of unemployed adults. If adults engage with education or training outside of NAV, they risk losing their social security benefits. If they return to upper-secondary education, they risk losing the ability to undertake employment should the opportunity arise. The system is quite rigid in its orientation and lacks flexibility in this regard, which according to NALA (2011) is necessary when working with marginalized groups from disadvantaged areas.

The Ministry for Children, Equality and Social Inclusion and the Directorate for Integration and Diversity are responsible for Norwegian language and training for migrants (OECD, 2014b), while the Agency for Adult Learning (VOX) is responsible for the administration of the Program for Basic Competence in Working Life (BKA). It also coordinates the career guidance service, and the pedagogical and curricular issues that arise through the teaching of socio-cultural orientation and Norwegian language to adult immigrants (NMER, 2016). In the context of these services for adults, the only aspect that was mentioned in the 2014 white paper was that of adult guidance. It states that ‘each municipality and county authority shall provide an educational and psychological counselling service’ (NMER, 2014c, p.32). It will be available for people with disabilities as well as adults with the right to primary and lower secondary education. Although the Norwegian system is cited for its success (OECD, 2014b) the programs and procedures of the system were not incorporated into the white paper, thus limiting the current analysis of the Norwegian adult education infrastructure.

## **5.6 The Proposed Structure for Ireland's Adult Education System**

The proposed core principles of the Irish white paper are; lifelong learning as a systematic approach, and the promotion of interculturalism and equality.

A systematic approach according to the white paper should provide services such as career guidance and childcare (IDES, 2000). In this regard the white papers contain similarities in that they both advocated provision for career guidance in adult education. The EU were influential in this respect not just with regards to anti-poverty benchmarks set through NAPS, which advocated such services, but also as a source of funding through the European Social

Fund (Ibid); further influencing the contents of the white paper through OMC. The white papers state that there is an ‘urgent need to develop flexible mechanisms for accreditation of prior learning (APL) and work-based learning’ (WBL) (Ibid, p. 82). However provision in this regard was not mentioned. A tool for implementation of this sort was also not considered within the Norwegian white paper. However within the Irish system once one is over 23 one is considered a mature student. This means that on returning to education, one can apply to third level institutions regardless of obtaining a leaving certificate after completion of upper secondary school (OECD, 2013). The third level institutes take into account prior learning and work based learning if appropriate. Thus if one is working in a relevant area they may find that they are exempt from certain modules of a degree, or that their work experience gives them advantages when applying for third level. Within the Norwegian white paper the apprentice system can be interpreted as a way of acquiring a qualification through work, which will be discussed further in section 5.9.2. Although neither white paper spoke of those exact terms, initiatives are in place to allow for APL and WBL which may be of benefit to those with low educational attainment. It can increase flexibility of educational systems and provide educational credits in lieu of work experience, which may be beneficial to those who receive little training in the workplace.

## **5.7 The promotion of Interculturalism in Norway**

Both white papers aimed to encourage interculturalism whilst promoting national identity. The Norwegian white paper presented a concern for maintaining nationhood while advocating the inclusion of a diversified population. It sets within its core objectives the maintenance of Christian and Humanist values, with an emphasis on an appreciation for ecology and human rights. Education and training is employed to promote national culture while advocating an understanding of ‘international cultural traditions’ (NMER, 2014c, p.1).

Both white papers aim to combat racism through education. The Norwegian white paper states that ‘all forms of discrimination shall be combated’ (Ibid), while the Irish white paper refers to ‘combating racism’ (IDES, 2000, p. 13) and encouraging participation within diverse groups. The Norwegian white paper purports to promote equality and democracy. However, no concrete strategy was mentioned to address this issue.

## **5.8 The promotion of Interculturalism in Ireland**

The Irish white paper intended to program the adult education network with regard to norms of diversity and inclusion, which should be incorporated into the previously largely homogeneous Irish identity. The Irish document, like the Norwegian document, seeks to bolster the national culture while encouraging the inclusion of marginalized groups such as refugees, immigrants, people with disabilities and Travelers<sup>2</sup>. In this regard the white papers are remarkably similar. Meyer et al. (1997), although concerned with social and economic goals, argues that systems contain similar goals. One could argue that in the case of the Norwegian and Irish system a concern for nationhood and the promotion of diversity is prevalent along similar lines. They want to incorporate and facilitate diverse cultures whilst advocating their respective cultures.

Putnam (1996) states that norms can be used for mutual or collective benefit. ‘Norms that accept diversity and inclusion’ (Kilpatrick, Field and Falk, 2003, p. 422) can be important in community development; through facilitating ‘diversity as the norm’ (IDES, 2000, p. 13),

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<sup>2</sup> The Travelling community in Ireland are an indigenous minority who have been part of Irish society for centuries. They are traditionally nomadic, and constitute approximately 0.5% of the total national population. They experience prejudice with higher levels of health problems, and lower levels of education, than the general population ([www.itmtrav.ie](http://www.itmtrav.ie)).

one could argue that the generation of social capital is being facilitated, as norms are a fundamental characteristic through which social capital operates.

## **5.9 Second Chance Options and Preventative Measures for Early School Leavers (ESLs) in the Norwegian White Paper**

The Norwegian education system aims to approach students with ‘trust, respect and demands’ (NMER, 2014c, p.2). Trust is a fundamental characteristic of social capital. People and institutions ought to be trustworthy so that reciprocation of trust can benefit the community. Fukuyama (2001) argues that trust can not only have positive effects within the groups in which it develops but can also expand to expectations for reciprocity and cooperation in external networks. Thereby through approaching students with trust, the students can reciprocate that trust both in the school environment and in society, thereby making provision for the generation of social capital.

The Norwegian white paper, however, was sparse in detail concerning the system of adult education in Norway. It did make slight provision for adults with low educational attainment and preventive measures for young people who were identified as at risk from ESL. The following section will discuss Ny Giv, and the apprenticeship systems of Norway and Ireland.

### 5.9.1 Ny GIV

Early identification of those who may leave school early is a challenge for Norway (OECD, 2014d). This is in part the goal of Ny GIV, which adopted a three pronged approach; with the third aspect of the program being ‘Oppfølgingsprosjektet’ (follow up project). It was the sole element which Ny Giv that was mentioned in the white paper, therefore it will be the only aspect of the project under examination. It was mentioned under the section concerning upper secondary education and targets NEETs<sup>3</sup>. The project was launched by the then Minister for Education Kristin Halvorsen in the fall of 2010 for an initial period of three years, and is to be extended through 2016 (NMER, 2012).

It targets the 10 per cent of students with the lowest grades after the first period of tenth grade (Bakken & Sletten, 2011), and consists of intensive training in reading, writing and arithmetic (NMER, 2012). It can be understood as a network through which students and teachers work together in order to achieve shared objectives. Its goal was to boost the upper secondary completion rate from 70% to 75%, and to improve student motivation for learning and comprehension of basic skills (OECD, 2015) among 16-21 year-olds who are Neither in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). Through the use of bonding and bridging ties between participants, employees and/or volunteers, social capital in the form of trust, norms and networks is created. Bonding ties within the Ny Giv network can promote information and skills sharing, however strong ties may also aid in excluding information from the network. On the other hand bridging ties can be more effective than close ties in the contribution of new knowledge and resources, and can complement close bonding ties (Kilpatrick, Field and Falk, 2003).

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<sup>3</sup> A NEET is defined as a youth, between the age of 15 and 29, who is Neither in Education, Employment or Training ([www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org))



The Kunnskapsdepartementet (NMER) reported in November 2012 that Ny GIV has been a success with the most vulnerable students being reached and receiving benefits from the measures. However, Sletten, Bakken & Andersen (2015) assessed the 'Oppfølgingsprosjektet' and found that due to the voluntary nature of the programme, 'some of the students that were actually among the 10 percent weakest did not participate in the intensive training, while some of the students in the "second-weakest group" were included' (p. 111). They also found that 'there has been no corresponding change for those at greatest risk of being outside school and work on a permanent basis' (p.162). However, there was an increase in the proportion of NEETs attending training models which combined upper secondary school objectives with work experience, and there is now better cooperation among schools, the follow-up service and NAV. However they argued that improvements should be made to the follow-up register used to reach NEETs 'and to give more priority to those who are most at risk of long-term marginalization from the labor market' (Ibid). Students thought that the initiative improved motivation and learning, and they felt they received new opportunities to succeed according to the then Minister, Kristin Halvorsen (NMER, 2012). Sletten, Bakken & Haakestad (2011) found that three out of four pupils who participated described their learning as interesting and useful. Students felt that teachers had more faith in them and placed higher demands on them than their regular curriculum. This project draws parallels to Coleman's functional use of social capital in education and learning, as a set of resources that 'are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person' (Coleman, 1994, p. 300).

Coleman inferred that when children live in an environment where they were expected to get high grades, and a sense of self-worth was promoted within the student body, the students achieved higher than expected academic results. Coleman therefore inferred that human capital could be counterbalanced by high levels of social capital, which could considerably

reduce the likelihood of high school dropout (Coleman, 1988). The academic results of Ny Giv are measurable; competence in new skills can be developed, and may in some cases enhance the human capital of Norway's youth population. Thereby social capital acts as a multiplier of human capital which is in line with Bourdieu's (1986) views on forms of capital.

### **5.9.2 Apprenticeship**

Both the Norwegian and Irish white papers mentioned apprenticeships, however they were mentioned in different context. The Norwegian Ministry for Education and Research (NMER) saw apprenticeships as being linked with upper secondary school, however they do not have to be exclusively linked to a school or programme. The Irish white paper on the other hand specified apprenticeships within the realm of further education. The following paragraphs will discuss firstly the apprenticeship system in Norway, followed by an analysis of the Irish system.

An apprentice within the Norwegian white paper was defined as someone who has entered into a 'contract with a view to taking a trade or journeyman's examination in a trade' (NMER, 2014c, p.21), which can also be taken if the participant is not in an apprenticeship or school. In this case the length of work experience obtained within the trade must be 25% longer than that is required for a regular apprenticeship. This measure allows some flexibility at the apprenticeship end of education. It can be interpreted as a use of WBL. Flexibility is infused into the system and allows for options outside of the mainstream which are attractive and useful to those who have, or come from, a background of low educational attainment (NALA, 2011).

In Ireland, during a period known as the Celtic Tiger (pre 2008) the economy was thriving and heavily reliant on the construction industry. The 2000 Irish white paper recommended the increase of apprenticeships because it predicted a shortage in the area by 2003 (IDES,

2000). Many students, mainly males, left upper-secondary school early, or did not pursue third level education, in favor of apprenticeships within the highly paid construction industry (Lally, 2012). However the housing market was significantly impacted by the economic crisis of 2008, and the role of apprenticeships was made redundant. Apprenticeships were subsequently cut from the budget. The economy then started to improve, and a review of the apprenticeship model was initiated in 2012 (OECD, 2013). Nevertheless, the OECD claims that the apprenticeship system in Ireland is limited to a narrow set of occupations. Diversifying the apprenticeship system can offer more choice, and better meet the needs of the labor market (OECD, 2013), thus allowing for the creation of human capital which holds competitive advantages within a knowledge-led global economy (Boutin et al., 2009).

## **5.10 Second Chance Options and Preventive Measures for ESLs in the Irish White Paper**

The Irish white paper proposes a '*Second Chance Further Education Framework*', built on four pillars, with three of these being relevant to this research. They will be discussed in the following order; firstly, The National Adult Literacy Programme, followed by an ICT Basic Skills Programme, and finally the Back To Education Initiative (BTEI). All of the below educational initiatives proposed by the white paper serve as an intervention to boost the human capital of the students through the development of skills. Skills and knowledge are a form of capital and are important factors within a knowledge-led global economy (Boutin et al., 2009). The perception is that through the acquirement of skills and knowledge students can expect a financial return in lieu of time and money spent on their education. Returns are measured by an increase in income that is greater than the cost of schooling. In the case of the following programs education is free to participants, mainly as a consequence of their lower

socio-economic status. Therefore the return in investment is related to government expenditure and the perceived social and economic value of education when aimed at those with the lowest levels of skills within the community.

### **5.10.1 National Adult Literacy Programme**

The 'National Adult Literacy Programme' was a top priority for the then government. It aimed to tackle the low levels of literacy among the adult population in Ireland. The white paper refers to the OECD's International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) (1997) which found that 25% of the Irish population scored at level one, the lowest level of a five level survey. A further 32% of the population were located on level two of the scale. Ireland had the highest level of Illiteracy of those studied, behind Poland (IDES, 2000). The white paper states that the IALS (1997) elevated concerns of adult literacy to center stage and 'highlighted the mismatch between the resources being allocated to adult literacy provision and the scale of the task' (Ibid, p. 55). This is evident when one considers the proportion of financial capital directed towards literacy. Funding increased from £0.85 million in 1997 to £7.825 million in 2000, representing a striking increase which the government attributes directly to the OECD survey (Ibid), thus confirming its influence on the white paper.

The Irish Department of Education and Skills (IDES) has provided funding for programs which admitted 130,000 participants by 2008. This figure appears promising as the white paper proposed to reach 113,000 by 2006. Nevertheless as of 2012 illiteracy levels in Ireland were still alarmingly high with 1 in 4 adults having difficulty with reading and writing (Lally, 2012). The Irish Central Statistics Office (CSO) reported in 2008 that 14% of 15 to 64 year olds in Ireland had an education of primary level or below (CSO, 2014). NALA (2011) stated that there is a 'gap between developing an adult literacy white paper and finding ways to put it fully into effect' (p. 4). World society theory interprets this as decoupling which can be a

result of isomorphism. Also visible in the Irish case is an increase in literacy levels to boost economic progress and social cohesion, as well as come in line with standards of other industrialized countries, thus supporting the voluntary characteristic of world society as explained by Meyer et al. (1997).

### **5.10.2 ICT Basic skills programme**

The application of ICT in adult education in Ireland was in its infancy in 2000 (IDES, 2000). The white paper recognized that ICT literacy is an ‘increasingly essential requirement for the participation in daily life’ (Ibid, p. 99). Hiniker & Putman (2009) reveal that the useful life of information in 1980 was estimated at ten years. By 2002 it was estimated at fifteen months. In Ireland increased requirements for report writing ‘is frequently cited by employers as a motivating factor behind the initiation of workplace courses’ (NALA, 2011, p. 59). The amount of employees that identified computers as an essential part of their work rose from 31% in 1997, to 40% in 2001 (Wolf, 2005). Lack of ICT knowledge can be a major barrier in work and education. The Irish white paper argues that a successful economy requires a foothold in innovation and technology in order to maintain a prosperous economy, as well as providing life skills for citizens. Both concerns reflect characteristics of social and economic progress, which as argued by Meyer (1997), are elements of world society.

### **5.10.3 Back To Education Initiatives**

The third pillar of the Second Chance Framework is the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) which proposed expansion of Post Leaving Cert (PLC), Youthreach and Traveler education, which will be discussed respectively in the following paragraphs. They are principally aimed at adults and young people who hold less than an upper secondary education (IDES, 2000).

The PLC is an alternative route into education for mature students or young people who have completed upper secondary education. It was introduced in 1985. The courses are generally one year and should operate in alignment with the labor market, providing skills and building the human capital of the nation. However, Sweeney (2013) reported that the labor market justification for new courses is poorly monitored. He also raised concerns about the amount and quality of the work experience involved, 'which can rest primarily on the participants' own initiatives' (p. 83). He recommends engagement with employers to increase the quality of work experience.

The OECD (2013) stated that the PLC program had some success, and allows for easier access to education. The number of students participating in PLC courses has increased steadily, from over 12,000 students in 1989/90 to 24,377 in 1999/2000 (IDES, 2000). In 2012 numbers increased to 35,600 (Sweeney, 2013) with 34% of participants being over 21 in 2000 (OECD, 2013).

To ensure the successful integration of the Travelling community within the education system the government proposes to employ more Travelers within its Traveler services as they have a connection with the community. The Traveler education practitioners to some in the community may serve as bridging ties in accordance with Putnam's (2001) interpretation of social capital. They may serve to build connections between the Ministry for Education and the Traveling Community. These weaker ties reach outside the network and provide new

knowledge and resources. Putnam (2001) states that bridging networks' are better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion' (p.22).

Youthreach was mentioned in Norway's Skills Strategy Assessment by the OECD (2013) as an example of a project that successfully works with young people who have dropped out of education. It is aimed at 15-20 year olds (OECD, 2014d), and students are paid for their participation as well as being provided with work experience (OECD, 2013). 53% of early school leavers continue their education in Youthreach (Lally, 2012); 75% of these progress to either the labor market or further education and training (Youthreach, 2014). According to Hammond (2004), ESLs who participated in Further Education courses, reported improved health and well-being as a consequence.

Putnam (2001) states that bonding forms of social capital can be found within organizations such as youth groups. The same bonding ties may also be observed within the Ny Giv network as stated earlier in section 7.1. These are strong ties or social relations between like-minded people. Within the boundaries of the Youthreach network bonding ties can promote information sharing. Thus within initiatives for marginalized groups both bridging and bonding ties can be observed. Putnam (2001) argues that; 'bonding and bridging are not 'either-or categories into which social networks can be neatly divided, but 'more or less' dimensions along which we can compare different forms of social capital' (p. 23).

## 5.11 Funding

The Norwegian white paper does not broach the subject of funding in adult education.

However the researcher was able to glean information from various OECD reports and social researchers which will be discussed in the following sections.

In accordance with importance to the Irish government, the funding priorities of the Irish white paper are as follows; addressing the literacy needs of adults, increasing opportunities for those who hold less than an upper secondary education, the development of services such as adult guidance, counselling and childcare, along with enhancing the relevance, responsiveness and flexibility of the education and training sector to optimize the benefits of those at risk (IDES, 2000). It was argued that 'educational need should be the critical criterion in determining who should receive state support to return to learning' (Ibid, p. 77).

### 5.11.1 Tax Incentives Norway and Ireland

In Norway, corporate tax incentives allow tax deductions from corporate income when employees receive training related to their job. This is common within the OECD. Training of employees can be deducted as normal business expenses.

The Irish white paper quotes the use of tax incentives to promote adult learning which was advocated in the 1995 European White Paper, *Teaching and Learning; Towards the Learning Society* (IDES, 2000). It is also advocated by human capital theorist Schultz (1961) who made the argument that 'tax laws everywhere discriminate against human capital' (p. 13). This is no longer the case, as it is common within OECD and EU countries to have tax incentives for the generation of human capital. The Irish white paper promotes tax relief for all participants for fees incurred while engaging in nationally accredited learning programs, irrespective of duration or level. The white paper states that there is a need for firms to consider investment in human capital. It should be planned 'on a par with firms of other



European countries' (IDES, 2000, p. 127). A concern is presented here to attune to the specifications of other EU countries and voluntarily take part in what Meyer et al. (1997) refer to as world society, where various countries concurrently develop remarkably similar systems and maintain programs that espouse liberal, economic and social ideals.

### **5.11.2 Government Investment in Education in Ireland and Norway**

Ireland has raised its investment in education to come in line with OECD averages from '4.2% in 2000 and 5.7% in 2008' (OECD, 2014a, p. 2) to 6.5% of GDP in 2010 just above OECD average of 6.3% (OECD, 2013). Norway invested 7.6% of GDP in education in 2010 which was the third highest within the OECD (Ibid), although the European Adult Education Association (EAEA) (2014) expressed some worry that grants for adult education in Norway may face cuts. Financing was not mentioned in the 2014 white paper.

In Ireland, despite the increase in expenditure to counter it, high unemployment still exists. 'The link between education, training and economic development is complex and participating in education and training does not necessarily drive prosperity for all' (Tett, 2014, p. 21). As of 2011 the Irish unemployment rates at all educational levels were above the OECD average, and more than doubled between 2008 and 2011. However this was at the deepest point of the recession which severely impacted the economy in 2008. Norway, on the other hand, witnessed an early recovery from the economic crisis, and the Ministry of Education invested heavily in education throughout (OECD, 2014b). During 2010 - 2014 the budget for the skills almost doubled and expenditure per student is significantly above the OECD average from primary schooling through to tertiary education (Ibid).

In light of the economic crisis in Ireland, adult education suffered a loss in terms of funding (EAEA, 2014), even though general spending in education increased. One could argue that this could represent a breach of the government's commitment to adult education as presented in the 2000 document. Funding was cut from 'training and apprenticeship programs, programs for disadvantaged students, guidance counselling for vocational and secondary schools, and funding for higher education' (OECD, 2013, p. 14). Universities tend to receive large investments, while literacy education is highly vulnerable to cuts (Tett, 2014). In order to secure funding at the national level, one could argue for benchmarks for national expenditure in adult education (EAEA, 2014). However no such initiative was mentioned in either the Norwegian or the Irish white paper. As programs for marginalized groups are sensitive to funding cutbacks in the wake of an economic crisis, which can be cyclical in nature, benchmarks for expenditure could prove valuable to the adult education sector.

## **5.12 Marginalized Groups**

The Irish white paper is mainly aimed at people with low levels of literacy, early school leavers (ESLs), social welfare recipients, and those on low incomes that are returning to education (IDES, 2000). Poverty, discrimination and other social and economic problems were proposed to be countered by adult education (Ibid). Whereas the Norwegian white paper, although sparser in detail, is also concerned with those from the lower echelons of educational attainment. The following section will deal with the marginalized groups which are addressed within both policies.

### **5.12.1 Immigrant and Refugee Education in Norway**

Norway is witnessing an influx of immigration due to the refugee crisis and a prosperous economy. At the same time unemployment is now rising due to a strong contraction of the petroleum extraction industry. The OECD (2014d) suggested that Norway enhance the use of migrant skills, as by 2040 they will represent close to 20% of the overall population and 30% in Oslo. 'Over-qualification' is widespread across the migrant population and they are two and a half times more likely to be overqualified than native Norwegians (Ibid) in the areas of formal education and language skills. In 2014 the EAEA and the OECD (2014d) proposed that Norway focus on education for immigrants; however, this problem was not addressed within the white paper. Although education specifically for immigrants is featured in the recent 2016 white paper on adult education.

### **5.12.2 Immigrant and Refugee Education in Ireland**

Provision is made within the Irish white paper for refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants. The government acknowledges the need for 'basic literacy and language education for all immigrants' (IDES, 2000, p. 50). The white paper states that 'refugees are entitled to the same access to education and training as Irish nationals' (Ibid, p. 172), and asylum seekers can avail of free access to adult literacy and part-time courses following one year's residence in Ireland (Ibid). Access to education and training programs cannot be used as a basis for seeking an extension for remaining in the State should their application for asylum be rejected (Ibid). Difficulty in obtaining recognition for previously acquired skills is seen as a challenge within the Irish white paper. However a solution was not outlined in this regard. Within both countries the human capital of the immigrant population is not used to its full advantage. Friedberg (1996) in her study of Israel, an OECD country, found that 'human capital is found to be imperfectly portable across countries' (p. 25). The origin of an

individual's education can determine its value to the labor market. Thus the lack of initiatives that facilitate the recognition and conversion of their skills represents a loss in terms of human capital for both the individuals and the states they reside in.

### **5.12.3. Older Cohort in Norway**

Most western countries, including Norway and Ireland, are experiencing demographic changes which increases the need for Adult Education policies. Falling birth rates and rising life expectancy are putting added pressure on the economy. Therefore promoting the upskilling of the available workforce is an imperative of adult education policies (Holford et al., 2007). Due to the demographic of most Western countries, the OECD and EU promote the re-skilling of the older generation, so that they can continue to contribute to the economy of their respective countries. 'In Norway it is believed people would work until the official retirement age if they had greater competence in ICT' (Holford, 2008, p. 15). Therefore training in this regard would enable them to remain in active employment for longer. People who are some years from retirement may also need training to keep up with changing job demands. The Irish white paper goes one step further and proposes educational initiatives for the elderly, while the Norwegian white paper does not mention education in terms of the older cohort.

### **5.12.4 Older Cohort in Ireland**

The Irish white paper noted that 'adult education can play an important role in contributing to active ageing, promoting social interaction, reducing health costs, enhancing the quality of life, and providing new technology for many whose mobility and access to information and communication might otherwise be restricted' (IDES, 2000, p. 167). It was perceived in the consultation process before the finalization of the Irish white paper, that the lifelong aspect of

adult education should not be limited to the working life of the learner, but should include learning after retirement and the contribution those learners can make to society. In reply to this the white paper removed age barriers to third level education, Post Leaving Cert courses and to adult literacy programs. Free education is proposed for pensioners who hold less than an upper secondary education. This may be in an effort to reduce literacy levels and to allow for easier access to daily literacy and numeracy activities, as well as boosting the value of education within families, communities and the nation at large.

### **5.12.5 Institutionalized and Homeless People in Norway and Ireland**

The Norwegian white paper outlined education for prisoners, and those in welfare and medical institutes, as being the continued responsibility of the county. People within these institutions should have access to the necessary 'primary and lower secondary education, special educational assistance and upper secondary education' (NMER(c), 2014, p.54).

The Irish white paper mentioned education for prisoners and the homeless, whilst neglecting to mention education for those who are within other institutions outside of prisons. Within the prison system, offenders disproportionately come from marginalized disadvantaged backgrounds. They tend to be unqualified and at a high risk of unemployment (IDES, 2000).

The then Irish government proposed to invest £70.7m in vocational training, personal supports and the facilitation of work experience, in an attempt to re-integrate them 'into the social and economic life of their communities' (Ibid, p. 176). The key aim is to enhance the diversity and relevance of the education system. Further exploration of the educational changes needed was not explored. Educational opportunities for homeless people was proposed to be provided in hostels, as well as in mainstream education and training centres. Both white papers make provision for social and human capital for people within institutes, albeit different types of institutes. Social capital entails the building of norms, trust and

networks. Education can increase trust, and its reciprocal nature may enhance social cohesion. Through creating links by means of education and/or employment the creation of a network was proposed. Bridging and bonding ties can operate through the network and enhance the skills of people in institutes in both countries, thus making provision for the development of human capital through the ties of social capital may be evident. The economic benefits of education raise the human capital of ex-prisoners, therefore allowing them to choose alternative options in the future. If one's experience of adult education was a positive one, then one could pass on the perceived value of education to their families and community at large through bonding and bridging social capital. The benefits of social capital spreads out into the community and are not confined to the individual as demonstrated in table 1, section 2.4.

### **5.12.6 People with Disabilities in Norway and Ireland**

People with disabilities were included in the 2014 Norwegian white paper. It stated that ‘adults who either do not or are unable to benefit satisfactorily from the ordinary educational provisions for adults, have the right to special education’ (NMER, 2014c, p.26). The OECD raised concerns about education for people with disabilities in its 2014 Skills Strategy Diagnostic Report for Norway. It argued that enhancing labor market participation among those receiving disability benefits was imperative. In Norway 7% of the workforce is on sick leave at any given moment, by far the highest rate in the OECD. Over 10% of Norwegians receive permanent or temporary disability allowance, and the rejection rate for disability claims is among the lowest in the OECD. The rate of returning to employment is also low; therefore people receiving disability allowance represent a loss for Norway's human capital (OECD, 2014d). The OECD expressed concerns that, although employment rates among older Norwegians is high, one quarter of people over 55 are registered as disabled, which is

nearly double the OECD average. It is worth noting that in other countries, excluding Ireland, these figures may be included in the unemployment register and receive benefits as unemployed; thus making international comparability problematic.

Ensuring equal access for people with disabilities in adult education was proposed in the Irish white paper. The contemporary scheme was unfunded by the then government. It was identified as a model that could provide increased integration of people with disabilities into the mainstream. The government also proposed an extension of community education to increase the integration of people with disabilities, so that they may avail of mainstream options on an equal basis (IDES, 2000). Within this section the concern for equity is strong thus in part confirming the presence of liberal social ideals within the adult education white papers of both Ireland and Norway.

### **5.12.7 Early School Leavers (ESLs) in Norway**

De Ridder et al. (2013) identified people as drop outs or early school leavers within the Norwegian education system if they had not completed senior high school in the calendar year the student turned 24 years old. This is in contrast with Ireland's definition which identifies people as ESLs upon leaving the education system before the age of 16, and or leaving upper secondary school without the minimum of five passes in their Leaving Certificate (IDES, 2000). In Norway the percentage of young people who were expected to complete upper secondary education within their lifetime was down to 88% in 2012 from 99% in 2000. Although the Norwegian figures are above the OECD averages of 84% and 76% respectively, the proportion of young people expected to finish upper secondary school is in decline (OECD, 2014b). The proportion of 25-64 year olds holding an upper secondary education has fallen from 85% in 2000 to 82% in 2011.

High dropout rates from upper secondary education has been a constant in Norway for some time. 650,000 adults do not hold an upper secondary education; of them '20,000 participated in upper-secondary education in 2012' (OECD, 2014d, p. 138). The 2003 OECD survey of Adult Literacy and Lifeskills (ALL) found that 400,000 Norwegian adults have poor reading, mathematics and ICT skills, so much so that they have difficulty functioning in both work and society. However this was not addressed in the white paper.

A large proportion of people with poor literacy skills are immigrants. Many of them are out of work, or are at risk of dropping out of the labor market in the long term (NMER, 2014a). Statistics Norway (SSB) projects that by 2030 the labor market will have a surplus of people with primary schooling as their highest level of education, making them vulnerable to economic disadvantage (NMER, 2014a). Thus initiatives that go some way in impeding growing rates of ESLs should be imperative to government.

The Norwegian white paper does not go into detail about ESLs, but it does address the right to education. It states that upper-secondary education or training is free in public schools. Young people have a right to three years full time upper secondary education and training provided that they fulfil primary and lower secondary education. This right to education extends up to age 24. One can still claim the right to free upper secondary education, although upon application, as of the year that they turn 25. Within the Irish system, one can find routes into education regardless of completion of primary and lower secondary schooling. An alternative route into education was not mentioned within the bounds of the 2014 amendment to the Norwegian Education Act. Thus one could argue that the Norwegian system is more linear in fashion when compared to the Irish system. However it contains flexibility in terms of giving extra time to finish upper secondary education, an initiative that is not prevalent within the Irish system. However, the Survey of Adult Skills revealed the rate of Norwegians who complete on time is low. 'In 2012, 15% of those graduating from an



upper secondary programme were over 25 years old, one of the highest rates in the OECD, the average of which is 5%' (OECD, 2014b, p.2), and 16% of 25-34 year olds had not completed upper secondary education in 2012.

Students who drop out of school have a dramatically higher risk of becoming unemployed. In Norway an ESL is 'almost four times more likely to be unemployed than those who have completed tertiary education' (OECD, 2014d, p. 80), thus highlighting Norway's need to focus on low skilled youth. Although the percentage of NEET's is low at 7%, and youth unemployment in 2012 was roughly half the OECD average at 8.6% (OECD average, 16.3%), this group is overrepresented in NAVs statistics (NMER, 2014a). Thus for reasons related to economic progress and social equity, what Meyers refers to as world culture, Norway should have expressed some concern for this group in their white paper. Although it did express a concern for promoting students' sense of 'social belonging' (NMER, 2014c, p. 40).

Tackling the dropout issue in Norway has been on the agenda for some time according to the OECD (2014d). Sletten et al (2015) argue that 'one of the major goals in Norwegian education policy is to improve the completion rate in upper secondary education' (p.161), from 72% to 90%. However the 2014 white paper does not mention this goal or a concern for levels of dropout. Low levels of educational attainment and skills, and high levels of unemployment and poverty, may threaten social cohesion (Johnson, 2009), therefore providing education for those with low educational or employment prospects is valuable to nation-states.

The following table 2; represents the percentage of 15-29 year-olds who are Neither in Employment, Education or Training (NEETs), demonstrates the degree of disadvantage for

NEETs. It shows that increases in educational attainment levels decrease the likelihood of being outside the labor market and the educational realm.

Table 2; Percentage of 15-29 year-olds who are Neither in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) in Norway.

<b>Percentage of 15-29 year-olds Neither in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)</b>	<b>Norway 2012.</b>
Below upper secondary	10%
Upper secondary	7%
Tertiary	6%

(OECD, 2014b, p. 3)

### **5.12.8 ESLs in Ireland**

In Ireland The Central Statistics Office (CSO) revealed that in 2012 the number of students leaving before completion of upper secondary school was down to 9.7% from 19% in 1998 (CSO, 2014). Ireland invested heavily in literacy and dropout initiatives such as Youthreach and PLC, and as mentioned earlier in section 8, these programs have witnessed some success. In many unskilled jobs, a high school ‘leaving certificate is the minimum level of education required’ (Lally, 2012, p. 5), therefore ESLs are considerably disadvantaged when entering the labor market. In an environment of economic prosperity, employments rates are high among ESLs. For example in Ireland ‘In 2006, only 5% of early school leavers were unemployed’ (Ibid, p. 4). However, post economic crash that figure had risen to 23% in 2012.

Table 3 below ‘Unemployment Rates for 25 - 64 year-olds’ demonstrates that ESLs have a considerably higher prospect of being unemployed, when compared to those who receive a tertiary education. All the figures relate to 2012 and were compiled from the OECD's 2014 ‘Education at a Glance’ from both Norway and Ireland.

Table 3; Unemployment Rates for 25 - 64 year-olds

<b>Unemployment Rates for 25 - 64 year-olds.</b>	<b>Ireland.</b>	<b>Norway</b>	<b>OECD.</b>
<b>Below upper secondary</b>	23%	4%	14%
<b>Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary</b>	15%	2%	8%
<b>Tertiary education</b>	7.1%	2%	5%

(OECD, 2014a)

### 5.12.9 Family Literacy in Norway

In Norway and Ireland, people from family backgrounds with low education levels are vulnerable to intergenerational disadvantage (OECD, 2014a; OECD, 2014b). Parental levels of education are recognized as a ‘critical influence on children’s participation in education and their school performance. There is an increasingly compelling case for investment in the education of parents’ (IDES, 2000, p. 49). Becker (2011) argues that not only their performance in school is affected but also;

*‘the degree of intergenerational mobility in occupations and earnings between parents and children has been shown to be greatly affected by the degree of transmission of education from parents to children’ (p. xiii).*

In the OECD 66% of individuals with at least one highly educated parent acquire a tertiary degree while this figure falls to only 20% among individuals whose parents did not obtain an upper secondary qualification (OECD, 2014c, p. 42). Although the impact of socio-economic status is relatively low in Norway, people from immigrant or low educational backgrounds

are contending ‘to narrow the gap in attainment from one generation to the next’ (OECD, 2014d, p. 41).

Table 4 below entitled ‘Students aged 20 - 34 in Tertiary Education’ demonstrates that 73% of students in tertiary education have parents who followed the same educational route, whereas 6% of the tertiary educated students have parents who are ESLs. Although it is worth bearing in mind that the parents of the students considered in Table 4 are from a generation where tertiary completion was quite high.

Table 4; Students aged 20 - 34 in Tertiary Education

<b>Students in Tertiary Education, 20 - 34 year olds</b>	<b>Norway 2012</b>
Whose parents have not attained upper secondary education	6%
Whose parents have an upper secondary education	21%
Whose parents have a tertiary education degree	73%

(EAG, 2014, p. 3).

Unlike Ireland, low literacy levels in Norway pertain mainly to younger people. This may represent a problem in the future, regarding their ability to engage in higher education or the labor force (OECD, 2014d). A promising trend is that literacy levels increase with age, whereas in Ireland literacy levels are highest among the younger cohort. Considering the number of young people in Norway not completing upper secondary education is rising, one could argue that this area should be of concern for Norwegian policy makers. The employment of a system whereby parents are encouraged to be actively involved in passing on their forms of capital, either human, social or cultural, could be of benefit to the present and upcoming generations. Norway could employ a culturally relevant, rather than implanted system through which the young people could benefit from the capital of the older cohort by way of bonding social capital which Putnam (2001) argues is found in families.

### **5.12.10 Family literacy In Ireland**

In Ireland the adult population of 2000 had low literacy skills, therefore the concern was to break the cycle of low educational attainment. The white paper vaguely proposes providing education for parents, which can in turn help their children, and expanding current services. The Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme is in place in Ireland. It is a means of targeting young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and focuses on the parents or main caregivers responsible for the education of the children. HSCL tries to create better contact between parents, teachers and local civil society to tackle the issues that may encroach on the child's learning (OECD, 2014a). Although this measure was not mentioned in the 2000 document, it was in place at the time. HSCL witnessed a widening of its parameters in 2005 (IDES, 2015), and was mentioned by the OECD (2014d) as a successful programme in place to overcome the intergenerational disadvantage experienced by some.

By using social capital, which operates with social relations, parents can pass on their human capital, thus strengthening the human capital of their children. In this way social capital acts a multiplier of human capital.

Coleman (1988) demonstrated that lack of human capital on the part of the parents can be compensated with high levels of social capital. There are many resources beyond those that are captured by parental level of formal education. One could argue that measures of 'human capital' may fail to incorporate the human resources which parents can avail of to nurture their children's education.

## **5.13 Locations of Education**

The Norwegian white paper did not go into detail concerning the locations for education. The researcher shall insert commentary about the Norwegian system where possible in the following sections which deal with educational facilities, education in the workplace, creating links between education and industry, and finally community education.

The Irish white paper promotes the development of stand-alone centres for adult education (IDES, 2000). The facilities would support ‘course delivery, adult ICT access, crèche, cafe, advice centre, guidance and youth service’ (Ibid, p. 82). This could constitute the development of human capital in terms of courses offered and skills developed, as well as the inadvertent development of social capital through networks and relations. Coleman (1994) defines social capital as a set of resources that benefit the community such as networks, trust and social relations. His main focus for the development of social capital was within the closed structure of the family and neighborhood. He also allowed for the possibility of a formal organization generating social capital. It could be created for one purpose, in this case adult education and may facilitate the construction of social capital through facilitating norms, networks and social relations.

### **5.13.1 Workplace Education**

A trend within workplace education that is prevalent in both Norway and Ireland, and in OECD and EU countries in general, is that people with low levels of formal education receive little training in work. This can be compared to those on the upper echelon of the educational ladder who continue to gain skills while in employment further bolstering their human capital (Boutin et al., 2009; Holford, 2008). ‘Three times as many employees with a tertiary qualification participate in continuing education and training as employees with less than an upper secondary qualification’ (IDES, 2000, p. 42). Holford et al. (2007) observed

that people in the public sector are more likely to partake in training than those in the private sector. In general most people who are engaged in lifelong learning are employed; for example in Norway 70% of participants in adult education are in employment (OECD, 2014b). Therefore disadvantage is increasing between the low and high skilled workers. However it is worth bearing in mind that different occupations may call for different extensions to training and upskilling. Also, those who rise to higher levels of education in the mainstream formal system may be more personally disposed to pursue learning opportunities. Bearing that in mind, in Ireland ‘over four times as many people at literacy levels 4 and 5 in the IALS (1997) participated in adult education and training compared with those on the lowest literacy level’ (IDES, 2000, p. 42). Adult education in this regard appears to reflect, rather than challenge inequalities (Holford et al., 2007). Singh (2009) argues that it is important to recognize ‘the growing and alarming patterns of economic and political inequality that seemingly underpin the move towards a knowledge economy’ (p. 235). Education in employment for the low skilled was not mentioned in the Norwegian white paper.

The 2000 Irish White Paper stated that people at the lower skill level may be vulnerable in the event of an economic downturn. This came to fruition when the economic crisis of 2008 impacted the country's levels of unemployment. Figures rose dramatically within the ranks of those with low levels of educational attainment as seen in Table 3 ‘Unemployment Rates for 25 - 64 year-olds’ in section 5.12.8. The Irish white paper proposed literacy initiatives based in the workplace. However, as of 2009, general in-service training that is not work related is not a part of continuing vocational training (Agrawal, 2009, p. 198). High levels of unemployment leave social cohesion in a vulnerable position. Raising the human capital of the community safeguards against cyclical economic recessions which may be beneficial to

the future generations in both countries. However neither white paper proposed an initiative in this regard.

### **5.13.2 Creating Links Between Education and Industry**

The workplace is emerging as a learning organization. The Norwegian 2014 document did not mention this particular angle. However, the Irish government proposed to encourage partnerships between education, training and industry interests (IDES, 2000). In the consultation process employers expressed concern that the training should not disrupt the workplace, and the employer's financial contribution should be discretionary and voluntary (Ibid). They were one of the many other networks in the consultation process that emphasized the need for ICT training 'to counter exclusion and maximize its capacity as an education and training vehicle' (Ibid, p. 76).

The Irish white paper acknowledges that large companies are in a position to provide re-skilling for their staff. However small companies are more likely to rely on the education and training sector (IDES, 2000). In this regard the government, in 1999, through the National Training Networks Programme, provided £12.7m for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to carry out employer-led training initiatives. Of this figure at least £2m was contributed by companies, and £1.7m was provided by the European Social Fund. The EU played an influential role here in terms of providing funding which encouraged the progression of the initiative. The OECD (2014d) recognizes that employers need to invest in the workforce, and build upon existing skills. They 'play a key role in aligning education and training systems with labor market needs when they collaborate with training institutions and offer apprenticeships' (p. 109).

The creation of links between education and industry could constitute the creation of social capital; a network is being formed through relations and trust. The network works together in



order to achieve a shared goal of providing sufficient skills to the labor market; thus boosting the economy, and developing the human capital of the country.

### **5.13.3 Community Education**

Community education was mentioned in the Irish white paper. It is defined as the practice ‘whereby marginalized groups formulate a process of user-driven, learner centred and communal education’ (IDES, 2000, p. 28). The Community Education sector in Ireland was described as being impaired by low levels of resources, and a disconnect from assessment, accreditation and certification of learning (Ibid). In order to curb this, the government proposes to bring them into the mainstream of adult education (Ibid). There was concern that the professionalization of the sector would disband the current plethora of community educators. Community education funded and accredited by the government will in part lose its non-governmental character, as well as other characteristics that make it an attractive option of education for those who are most marginalized, and are hard to reach through traditional methods.

Community education has a bottom up structure which Schuller, Baron & Field (2000) argue develops social capital. It is focused more on the collective and generating trust, so therefore it is an important generator of social capital in communities, and can counter the concerns for society becoming too individualistic. It was highlighted for its achievement in reaching a large number of learners, particularly in disadvantaged areas. Characteristics of community education, as outlined by the white paper, are that it is physically rooted in the community through its activists, who have knowledge and respect for the culture of the community or network in which they are situated.

## 5.14 Conclusion

The Norwegian model is worthy of investigation because of its successful participation rates among the economically inactive, which is one of the highest in the OECD. Although adult education is well developed according to the OECD, such developments were only partially attended to throughout the 2014 white paper. Albeit to varying degrees, both Norwegian and Irish white papers encompass adult education, and mirror some of the same details. Both policies were concerned with promoting adult education for economic prosperity and equity, which are hallmark characteristics of the OECD and the EU, as well as fundamental concepts within world society theory. Meyer et al. (1997) argue idealized models are voluntarily adopted by countries. In some cases it does not necessarily fit the culture, budget or needs of the education system, this results in ‘decoupling’ between model and implementation. The Irish white paper proposed many initiatives which did not come to full fruition or received large funding cuts. Thus decoupling has emerged within the Irish adult education system. It aimed to promote the involvement of minority groups such as people with disabilities, Travelers, older adults, and people from disadvantaged areas. However, equity of access remains a problem in Ireland according to the OECD (2015) and NALA (2011).

*‘A challenge for Ireland is helping all students from different socio-economic and increasingly diverse immigrant backgrounds to reach their potential’ (OECD, 2015).*

Norway's 2014 Education Act did not deal with a reskilling agenda in much detail and sparsely addressed adult education. Thus proposals for the development of human capital was limited. The white paper was principally concerned with maintaining the rights of citizens in terms of equality of access for people with disabilities, and those in prison or other institutes. It also addressed the issue of access to adult guidance and transport for those who require it in order to be able to connect with educational services. It presented the Norwegian adult education system in a linear fashion with few options outside of mainstream education, and

failed to define what the white paper meant when it referred to, and made provision for, adult education. The Act does however emphasize the right to education for all legal residents. Norway now finds itself in a position where the ESL figures are recognized as high, and growing, therefore less conventional methods of adult education should be a consideration within the framework; firstly to curb ESL rates and secondly to contend with higher numbers of ESLs in or outside of the labor market. The white paper does not give space to immigrants or the older cohort. This may represent a loss of human capital within the Norwegian system. The Irish white paper on the other hand contained a greater amount of detail. It was written in the context of economic prosperity and a concern for the low educational attainments of the population. In 2000 the adult population had poor literacy skills, and a high rate of ESLs. The Irish white paper, in part due to its context, contained more options outside mainstream education than the Norwegian document. In Ireland if one falls through the cracks of mainstream education there are many options to re-engage with the education system. One can pursue adult education through PLC, Youthreach or Traveler Education. Also in Ireland once one is over the age of 23 they can be considered for tertiary education regardless of the completion or passing of upper secondary education. This is normally not the case in Norway; students must continue from one level to another in a linear fashion in order to qualify for third level education. Both systems however facilitate an apprenticeship route to education, although the Norwegian option is tightly linked to the upper secondary system, but not exclusively. It is generally not considered a route within adult education. The Irish option, although not restricted to upper secondary education, was deemed too narrow in focus by the OECD (2015).

Norway is cited as having a strong adult education system, and the participation rate of unemployed people in education was at 56% (OECD average 44%) in 2012. Although this figure is among the highest within OECD countries (OECD, 2014b), many initiatives for

adults were not mentioned in the course of the white paper such as NAV, VOX, BKA and Norwegian Language Training for Migrants. Thus they could not be reviewed in depth by the researcher. The Norwegian system that was in operation pre February 2016 was by the government's own admission 'confusing' (NMER, 2014a). However an attempt at clarification was not suggested in the 2014 document. The Norwegian white paper also did not discuss the allocation of funding for education within its bounds; therefore it left many questions unanswered. A limitation of this research was that it did not incorporate interviews which could more roundly answer the research questions. A recommendation for further research could be to include interviews from policy makers, from service users and people working in the field to evaluate the extent of difference made by the white papers and what more can be done in the area.

# 6 Conclusions and Recommendations

This research used qualitative discourse analysis to critically examine the Irish and Norwegian adult education white papers. The aim within both documents was to create and maintain a well-educated, competent workforce, in order to preserve and improve economic productivity, as well as cultivating sufficient social cohesion within societies. The researcher used three analytical frameworks through which they viewed the white papers to answer the following research questions.

## 6.1 The Dimensions of the Norwegian and Irish White Papers Which Came Under the Influence of the EU and OECD

Question one asked; ‘What dimensions of Irish and Norwegian adult education policies are subject to the influence of the OECD and EU?’ To adequately negotiate this question, this study employed Myer et al. (1997) world society theory in order to explain similarities found in both white papers and to explain the role of the OECD and EU in national policy. The EU was specified as an influence in the creation of the Irish white paper in terms of the goals presented as part of the 1996 EU, ‘*Year of Lifelong Learning*’. The use of education was also advocated to realize anti-poverty benchmarks set out by NAPS. The EU was referred to in the white paper both in a funding and policy advice capacity; for services such as career guidance, childcare, employer-led training initiatives for SMEs, and promoting a lifelong learning approach to education. The EU operationalized OMC to implement guidelines and timetables in order to achieve EU objectives on a national level.

Part of the impetus for change within the Irish white paper comes from a concern of falling behind other industrialized countries as well as a need to compete economically and to strengthen social cohesion. The OECD document *'Lifelong Learning for All'* (1996) was cited as an influence on promotion of lifelong learning, which is moving center stage in education policy across the developed world (IDES, 2000). The literacy budget increased as a direct result of how Ireland performed in international tests, according to the Irish white paper. Meyer et al. (1997) argues that if a nation state cannot put policies which mirror world society ideals in place, then world society structure will provide help in terms of funding and/or research. In the case of the Irish system the EU provide funding through OMC, and the rationalized others of the EU and OECD are often approached and give advice on best practice.

Within the bounds of the Norwegian white paper the influences of the OECD and EU were not as overtly highlighted as they were in the Irish document. However, similarities between the two systems are prevalent. Both countries are concerned with promoting equity and economic progress, which are goals of the OECD and the EU, as well as a concern for promoting the concept of lifelong learning through adult education. The Norwegian and Irish white papers contain similarities such as apprenticeships, education for people with disabilities, and education in prisons. They aim to combat racism through education, and demonstrate similar concerns for nationhood and interculturalism. However the Norwegian white paper did not lay down concrete strategies to encourage nationhood and diversity, while the Irish white paper did make proposals in this regard.

The Norwegian and Irish systems contain similarities in terms of tax deductions from corporate income when employees receive training related to their job. This is common within the OECD and the EU. Therefore one could argue that convergence in this regard is

evident. Although Norway does not mention funding, a system of tax initiatives does exist outside of the white paper. The Irish white paper promotes tax relief for all participants for fees incurred while engaging in nationally accredited learning programs, irrespective of duration or level. It argues that the development of human capital should be planned for as investment on a par with companies within other EU countries (IDES, 2000). An eagerness is presented to attune to the specifications of other EU member states and voluntarily take part in what Meyer et al. (1997) refer to as world society and develop a similar system to other industrialized countries.

Adult education was the last area of mass education in Ireland to be developed. One could argue that the western world is witnessing an expansion of adult education along the similar lines that Meyer et al. (1977) explains the expansion of primary education post WWII.

Nations possess remarkably analogous systems of adult education which set out to facilitate economic progress and social cohesion. Meyer's explanation for the concurrent expansion of education systems lies on the assumption that various countries inhabit a single social system, which experience similar cultural and organizational environments (Meyer et al., 1977). This thesis found similarities within the Irish and Norwegian white papers, however there are also aspects of the white papers that differ. The Norwegian white paper grounds itself in humanist and Christian values while the Irish white paper makes no such claim.

The following table 5: 'Comparison of Initiatives Implemented' demonstrates topics covered within both white papers.

Table 5: Comparison of Initiatives Implemented

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Ireland</b>	<b>Norway</b>
Reaching ESL	Yes	No
Parental Education for Children at Risk of ESL	Yes	Yes
Building ICT Skills	Yes	No
Improving Literacy	Yes	No
Career Guidance for Adults	Yes	Yes
Provision of Education for Older Cohort	Yes	No
Refugee and Asylum Seeker Education	Yes	No
Recognition of Prior Learning for Refugees and Asylum Seekers	No	No
Education in Institutes (other than prison)	No	Yes
Prison Education	Yes	Yes
Education for Homeless People	Yes	No
Partnership Between Education and Industry	Yes	No
Workplace Education	Yes	No
Apprenticeships	Yes	Yes
WBL - APL	No	No
Financing Education	Yes	No
Tax Relief for Student Fees	Yes	No
Tax Incentives for Employers who Provide Training for Employees	Yes	No
Benchmarks for funding in adult education	No	No



Meyer et al. (1975) argue world opinion influences government policy. Commencing change that reflects world opinion is a way of taking part in the world system, which sees vastly different nations initiate remarkably similar policies. Nevertheless jurisdiction to change policy is contained within the state, who voluntarily take part in world society. The concern for developments in the industrialized world and the instigating of such initiatives in line with the OECD and EU is prevalent in the Irish white paper, whereas the Norwegian document does not mention exogenous influences. It does however contain similarities in terms of goals such as economic progress and social cohesion which may indicate that the white paper was not developed in a vacuum, but fits into a larger picture of world society, and is subject to outside influence to a greater extent from the OECD and to a lesser extent the EU.

## **6.2 The Dominant Principles Underlying The Norwegian and Irish White Papers**

The second research question which guided this research is as follows: What are the dominant principles within both the Irish and Norwegian adult education white papers?

To answer this question the researcher used social capital theory and human capital theory and found the following patterns.

### **6.2.1 Social Capital**

Social capital operates through social relations. Characteristics such as networks, norms, trust and social ties, in this case bridging and bonding ties, are fundamental. The white papers are set within the context of human interaction on a community and a national level. Therefore social relation and social capital are a large feature. Ireland and Norway focus on social capital and personal development aspects of adult education, as well as strengthening the education system for economic progress. Both white papers focused on meeting the needs of

marginalized groups. The Irish white paper was according to the then Irish government, employed to promote democracy and social cohesion, to strengthen individuals, families and communities and to help address inter-generational poverty and disadvantage (IDES, 2000). The Norwegian white paper made provision for education in prisons and institutions, for people with disabilities and the right to free upper secondary education which extends past the age of 24.

Both white papers intended to programme the adult education network with norms of diversity and inclusion, thus allowing provision for the development of social capital through the creation of norms. The Irish white paper in particular talks to the concept of diversity being the new norm within adult education and that policy and practice should mirror that (IDES, 2000). In both systems initiatives such as, Ny Giv, prison education, Youthreach, traveler education, HSCL and community education inadvertently use social capital as a multiplier of human capital in accordance with Bourdieu's (1986) understanding of the function of capital. Social capital is employed through inadvertent means in an effort to meet the most vulnerable in society through the building and using of trust, networks and norms. Education can increase trust, and its reciprocal nature may enhance social cohesion within the groups. The Norwegian education system in particular explicitly states that it aims to approach students with trust. Social capital is created through inadvertent means and is employed as a generator of human capital in many initiatives that are aimed at marginalized groups. One needs social capital to facilitate creation of human capital, especially in the case of marginalized groups with low educational qualifications according to NALA (2011).

The consultation process within the Irish white paper can be interpreted as the development of social capital, which was generated via the stakeholders coming together to form a network with shared visions and goals. Networks are also created through stakeholders, and

linking the industry and education. The network works together in order to achieve a shared goal of providing sufficient skills to the labor market; thus boosting the economy, and using social capital as a multiplier of human capital within that network.

### **6.2.2 Human capital**

Education policies generally apply human capital theory. The development of skills and knowledge equates to the development of human capital. Therefore almost every initiative mentioned in the white papers is interested in the facilitation or creation of human capital. Within an Irish context these included the development of stand-alone centres for adult education, literacy programs, back to education initiatives and ICT basic skills programs. Also included are the creation of links between industry and education, as well as initiatives for SMEs to carry out employer-led training. According to both white papers human capital is to be created by addressing education for marginalized groups and making provision within the mainstream. However in the context of the Norwegian white paper the skilling and reskilling of the available workforce was not addressed. Thus the researcher argues that to enhance the levels of human capital available to the Norwegian labor market, policy makers should delve more deeply into making provision for adults who wish to return to education. Social and human capital based thinking is evident in the white papers; human capital where education is seen as a tool that can foster economic growth. Both white papers documented the importance of investing in skills to produce a highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce. This investment will in turn strengthen the country's knowledge economy and thereby their future (OECD, 2014d). Social capital thinking is evident where the policy mentions the development of skills to help maintain national concerns relating to environmental concerns, human rights, nationhood and facilitating diversity; thus promoting shared goals through which the network can operate and maintain norms of cooperation.

### **6.3 Areas in which Irish and Norwegian Adult Education Infrastructure Experienced Favourable Outcomes and Recommendation on Areas for Improvement**

The third and final research question that was dealt with in the course of this master's thesis was: 'What are the areas in which Irish and Norwegian adult education infrastructure have had favorable outcomes? Similarly, what are the areas in which they could improve?'

The Norwegian white paper makes little provision for the low skilled or those at risk of dropout, other than the right to free upper secondary education, and the follow-up aspect to Ny Giv, which received light commentary. The latter initiative enjoyed some success and its longevity has been extended.

The infrastructure of the Irish adult education sector according to the OECD's *Education at a Glance* (2013) was comprehensive and consists of measures which both help and encourage people who want to return to education and re skill. The document argues that the system can help reduce dead ends for students. Through the development of literacy programs and investment in ESL initiatives such as Youthreach, and PLC, the Irish system has witnessed some success in terms of improvements in literacy and school completion. As of 2012, 93% of Irish students were expected to complete upper secondary education in their lifetime (OECD, 2014a); higher than the OECD average of 84%. The Norwegian figures fell from 99% in 2000 to 88% in 2012. However initiatives to curb this were not mentioned in the Norwegian white paper. The researcher recommends that this area may need attention to avoid the low educational attainment of the future adult population. In Ireland initiatives that provided some help in this regard include; the Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme which tries to create better network relations between parents, teachers and local civil society.

Youthreach also saw 75% of participant's progress to the labor market or further education and training (Youthreach, 2014) as well as a positive rise in their mental health and wellbeing (Hammond, 2004). The percentage of NEETs decreased from 22% in 2011 to 18% in 2014. While this represents an improvement of sorts, the figure remains higher than the OECD average of 15.5% (OECD, 2015), and much higher than Norway, who in 2012, saw a rate of 7%.

PLC courses have witnessed an increase in participation from over 12,000 students in 1989/90 (IDES, 2000) to 35,600 in 2012 (Sweeney, 2013). This provides an important route for young people who may be returning to education. However the alignment with courses and the labor market does require attention as well as the quality of student's work experience (Ibid).

In 2012 illiteracy levels in Ireland were still considerable with 1 in 4 adults having difficulty with reading and writing (Lally, 2012), and as of 2008 14% of 15 to 64 year olds had an education of primary level or below (CSO, 2014). This, according to NALA (2011), may be in part because there is a gap between policy and implementation or what Meyer et al. (1997) refers to as decoupling due to the exogenous nature of the nation state which is built from a worldwide perspective, rather than a home-grown solution. Decoupling results from exogenously driven construction of national policy, when inconsistencies between the adopted model and local budgets, requirements or practices cause a disparity between policy and practice. Therefore reforms can be symbolic, and many of the adult education initiatives set out in the document either did not come to fruition (OECD, 2015)(NALA, 2011) or witnessed heavy cuts due to the onset of the economic crisis, despite the overall education budget increasing during that period. Thus access to adult education remains unequally distributed. Initiatives for the poorly skilled receive disproportionately small shares of resources allocated for education. In a Norwegian context, the white paper did not discuss

funding for adult education however, EAEA (2014) expressed some concern that grants for adult education may face some cuts. In order to secure funding at the national level EAEA (2014) argue for benchmarks for national expenditure in adult education, which may go some way to maintain a supply of resources for the sector.

There is a general trend within OECD and EU countries, including Norway and Ireland, that people with low levels of formal education receive little training in work. Norway and Ireland pertain to an apprentice model of education in employment. The breadth of both systems of apprenticeships could be widened. In an Irish context it could include more occupations as argued by OECD (2015) and in a Norwegian context it could be widened to more easily include adults who wish to return to education. The Irish white paper spoke about the development of workplace literacy initiatives (IDES, 2000, p. 198). However this may not have been rendered a reality according to Agrawal (2009). The researcher argues that education for the low skilled benefits the entire community in terms of intergenerational educational advancements, economic progress of the individual, their family and society, as well as higher levels of health, well-being and trust, which promotes social cohesion in the long run. Therefore both countries may benefit from introducing literacy, numeracy and ICT programs for the low skilled in their workplaces. The recognition of accreditation of prior learning (APL) and work-based learning (WBL) was recognized in the Irish white paper as a system that may be of benefit (IDES, 2000). However provision in this regard was not mentioned. A tool for implementation of this sort was also not considered within the Norwegian white paper. The researcher argues that a system such as this could increase the human capital of both countries, as well as expand access to education for the low skilled in the workplace.

The Norwegian white paper did not give space to the promotion of ICT skills, yet, the 2013 PIAAC found that 48% of Norwegians reported an introduction of new processes or technologies at their workplace (OECD, 2014d). Demographic changes are putting pressure on both economies. Training the available workforce in ICT would facilitate longer active employment, and both the OECD and EU promote the re-skilling of the older generation. In this instance the Irish white paper followed suit and made provision for the older cohort whereas the Norwegian white paper failed to mention them.

One area where a surplus of untapped skills lies is within the immigrant, asylum seeker and refugee population in both countries. The Irish white paper did succeed in making provision for refugees and asylum seekers in terms of free educational rights. However it was acknowledged that difficulty in obtaining recognition for previously acquired skills is seen as a challenge (IDES, 2000). Neither white paper addressed this, and it may be something worthy of review in the future.

## 6.4 Final Remarks

To conclude, the influences of the Irish white paper were overtly stated in the document as being from national, OECD and EU reports. The EU also played a role in terms of funding for childcare, career guidance services, the instigation of poverty benchmarks and funding for education initiatives within SMEs. The OECD influenced policy according to the Irish government through IALS (1997). Such influences on the Norwegian white paper were not as openly stated and were more difficult to uncover. Nevertheless some of the same concerns presented in each document reflected those held by the OECD and EU. They both wanted to encourage economic progress and social cohesion, as well as developing and maintaining a lifelong learning aspect to education. The white papers contained similarities in terms of the promotion of nationhood and diversity, along with education for the marginalized in society. The Irish document went into greater depth in terms of funding, however both countries possess similar systems of tax deduction from training which fall in line with other OECD and EU countries, thus in part confirming Meyer's world society theory. However, the white papers also contained some differences. The Irish white paper mentioned initiatives for reaching ESLs and the parents of those at risk of ESL, building ICT skills, education for refugees and asylum seekers. Although all of these issues were identified as challenges for Norway by the OECD (2014d), they were scarcely mentioned, if at all, in the white paper, and could be of benefit in enhancing human capital potential. Norway's education system, as presented in the white paper, is quite linear with limited options outside of the mainstream proposed. The development of a more flexible system may help increase participation from marginalized groups, as argued by NALA (2011).

The researcher found that both social and human capital can be interpreted as the guiding principles behind the white papers. Education policies generally generate the development of



skills and knowledge which equates to the development of human capital. Therefore initiatives in the white papers are concerned with the creation of human capital.

Within both documents social capital can be interpreted as being generated through the creation of norms; for instance nationhood and diversity. Initiatives that aim to encourage participation of marginalized groups could also be interpreted as inadvertently using social capital as a multiplier of human capital in accordance with Coleman (1988) and Bourdieu (1986). Social capital is employed through using trust, networks and norms. This is evident in the creation of networks in relation to prison education, disability services and youth work initiatives in both white papers, and through community education, education centres and the building of links between industry and education in the Irish white paper.

As a result of the thesis, the researcher made some recommendation in terms of initiatives which may help boost economic progress and social cohesion, which are concerns of each white paper. A system of WBL and APL may be useful within both countries, and may help those from the lower educational brackets find a route into adult education through giving educational credits for learning carried out in the workplace. However neither white paper initiated plans for the development of such systems. The recognition of prior learner for refugees and asylum seekers may also go some way to enhance integration, as well as facilitating economic development and social capital within societies. Education for the low skilled at work is also something worthy of promotion in both countries. Although it was recognized, and written provision was made in terms of literacy course in the workplace in the Irish white paper, the initiative did not come to fruition, which may be a result of decoupling. ICT skills in Norway was not addressed. Considering the current pace of technological development the researcher recommends that this area demands attention. ICT can provide ease of access to a technology rich environment as well as being useful in the workplace.

The Norwegian system presented within the white paper is very linear and does not go into detail concerning options for adult education outside of the mainstream. Dropout is pervasive throughout the OECD, and Norway is now in a position where there is a growing number of young people who will not complete upper secondary education. Thus the role of adult education is expanding and options need to expand with it. However initiatives in this regard were scarcely explored in the white paper. The Irish white paper on the other hand is very comprehensive in terms of its coverage of adult education and has a variety of options outside of mainstream education. However, as argued by NALA (2011), there is a gap between policy and implementation and many of the initiatives put forward in the white paper did not come to fruition, or instead suffered funding cuts. Adult education in both countries remains vulnerable to monetary cutbacks, thus a system of benchmarks for national expenditure in adult education as suggested by the EAEA (2014) could curb these losses.

To encourage more participation for those in marginalized groups, the researcher argues for a system by which the learner may temporarily leave adult education without being marked as a failure. This would be hugely beneficial in promoting participation. One could argue that such a system is in place in Norway as one is not considered a dropout until one reaches the age of 24 without having completed upper secondary education.

A more flexible system of adult education is recommended in order to facilitate participation of adults who may be under work, and family life, constraints. The world of work, technology and subsequently the role of education, continues to change. 'Countries which have not actively strived to maintain policy momentum in the development and improvement of their adult education literacy sectors have experienced significant stagnation' (NALA, 2011, p. 58). Great amounts of time, money, energy and resources must be invested to maintain momentum (Ibid). The researcher advocates for funding benchmarks and the sustained development of policy for adults who wish to return to schooling. Education can

break intergenerational cycles of low educational attainment, it can raise the social and human capital of adults so they may achieve economic, social and intellectual heights which may have been unavailable to them through earlier life choices.

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