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## *Theoretical models and concepts of lifelong learning<sup>2</sup>*

### **Extended summary**

The aim of this paper is to identify the different models and concepts of lifelong learning that dominate theoretical conceptualisations in the international arena and to use these as a basis for understanding a holistic model of lifelong learning.


On the one hand, an overview of lifelong learning theories shows that lifelong learning has three basic characteristics: it is lifelong, from “cradle to grave”; it is life-wide, taking place in the family, in educational institutions, in the workplace, in communities, in public spaces, etc.; and it is centred on learning rather than on education and educational institutions. On the other hand, such an overview also shows that different models and concepts of understanding lifelong learning are in use and that lifelong learning is also a “slippery” and “ambiguous” concept as it contains different and competing definitions.

The methodological framework used in a paper represents an analysis of the relevant theoretical literature. On this basis, the following main results are presented.

First, the paper shows how the concept of lifelong learning has changed over time, highlighting the importance of international organisations – the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU) – in conceptualising and promoting the concept from a humanistic to a strong and soft economic model of lifelong learning. Second, the paper argues that lifelong learning is a multidimension-

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al concept that combines different models and conceptualisations of lifelong learning. These are: (1) Schuetze and Casey's (2006) conceptualisation of four models of lifelong learning: the emancipatory or social justice model, the cultural model, the open society model and the human capital model; (2) Chapman and Aspin's (1997) and Biesta's (2006) triadic conceptualisation of lifelong learning, which serves three different purposes: lifelong learning for economic progress and development, lifelong learning for personal development and fulfilment, lifelong learning for social inclusion and democratisation; 3) Regmi's (2015) distinction between two basic models: the human capital model and the humanistic model; 4) Green's (2006) models of lifelong learning from a political economy perspective: the neoliberal or market model, the social market model and the social democratic model. However, even if lifelong learning lacks conceptual clarity, it nevertheless has a certain commonsensical value, which explains the popularity or acceptance of the concept itself.

Finally, the paper concludes by highlighting the fundamental building blocks of a holistically based understanding of lifelong learning, which encompasses three crucial dimensions of lifelong learning: (a) economic, i.e. acquiring new knowledge and skills for the world of work, employability and financial well-being, enabling learners to participate in better jobs and increase their income levels; (b) personal, i.e. learning for a better life, health, well-being, personal development and the holistic fulfilment of the human person and his/her potential; (c) democratic, i.e. learning to live with others in a more democratic, just and inclusive way, humanising and democratising society, promoting active citizenship, enabling citizens to engage in civil society and political life.

**Keywords:** adult education, concepts of lifelong learning, international organisations, lifelong education, models of lifelong learning

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