

Migration and Adult Education in Switzerland
The case of Italian immigrant associations in the 1960s and 1970s
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After World War II, the Swiss economy began to recruit foreign workforce to uphold the economic growth in Switzerland. Most of these migrant workers came from Italy and were employed in the economic sectors of metalworking, construction and textile. Until 1965, 400'000 of the 6 million people living in Switzerland came from Italy.

However, none of these migrant workers came to Switzerland on educational purposes. They rather migrated in search of employment and better income. But in the course of the 1960s, educational questions became more and more important for the communities of the Italian immigrants in Switzerland. The key players for the establishment of such educational courses were immigrant associations that were tightly linked to workers associations or unions in Italy.

In my presentation, I will shed three spotlights on these courses that were set up especially for Italian workers in Switzerland. First, the courses that the Italian immigration associations have set up ranged between the skill formation of the mainly unskilled immigrant workers from Italy and adult – or general – education to promote democracy or social justice. Second, these courses were widely supported by the Swiss economy and tolerated by the government. Initially set up by Italians to qualify their unskilled workers abroad in the prospect of their return, the courses conducted to skilled immigrated Italian workers for the Swiss economy. Third, regarding the wider context of adult education, the Italian immigrant associations were able to legitimate highly their courses by the emerging promotion of lifelong education.