

DGfE - German Educational Research Association (GERA)

Division for Adult Education

Conference Organised by the Division for Adult Education (GERA)

**15 to 17 September 2021 at Helmut Schmidt University / University of the Federal Armed Forces
Hamburg, Germany**

Adult Education in International Perspectives: Limits and Chances (Update call)

Recent decades have seen internationalisation bring on transformation processes within societies that not only have a lasting effect on the political and economic landscape, but also on other areas such as social welfare, health care and education. Accordingly, this phenomenon is set to continue in the future. The main characteristics of adult education include plurality, multi-perspectivity, transdisciplinary openness and the ability to react quickly under changing societal challenges (keyword: pandemic). These abilities are even more challenged by international developments like conflicts and confrontations which in turn influence international relations. This creates opportunities, but also constantly new challenges and boundaries, e.g., when efficiency and effectiveness demands are increasingly made in contradiction to the systems' own logic or when "global society" standardisation processes are taking place.

All educational sectors, such as schools, vocational training, higher education and adult and continuing education, are facing high pressure to change due to European and international developments. Encounters 'the other' opens up opportunities to reflect one's own identity and perceptions. In other words: opportunities of education arise. Processes (of learning and education) like these are by no means free of tension, yet, today they are more important than ever before.

The topic of this year's conference 2021 organised by the Division for Adult Education from the German Educational Research Association (GERA) at Helmut Schmidt University/University of the Federal Armed Forces Hamburg (Germany), evolves around the question to which extent international social, political, ecological, economic, and, more recently, pandemic developments will lead to new perspectives for adult education and learning.

European and international strategies to activate lifelong learning have been developed and changed over the years: national education systems are being compared, learning outcomes (competencies) are measured, points are awarded, and the quality of each education system is monitored and ranked. To this end, the EU initiated the open method of coordination (OMC) as a framework for education systems where best-practice examples serve to encourage countries to update their national education policies. Referring to the results of large-scale assessments such as The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) fundamental questions are asked concerning the effectiveness of education systems as well as their abilities to serve the labour market in view of demographic developments.

Despite these developments, which should be critically reflected, education systems often continue to focus their efforts on national perspectives, even though they are increasingly challenged by globalisation. International perspectives and experiences may on the one hand, enrich traditional structures, processes, organisations, procedures, etc., but they can also question them. Examples show that influences are permitted or adopted on an individual basis, thus serving to reinforce national interests. With the experiences of the last twelve months in a globally raging pandemic, we recognise that supposedly stable,

established structures are exposed to sudden crises that - as under a burning glass - bring to light "concealed realities" (Negt). How does adult educational science deal with these ambivalences and changes, some of which have far-reaching implications for education policy and novel, overall structural transformation effects? Which driving forces can only be identified through international perspectives or in such a way?

The German adult education research community has been investigating and comparing international policies for some time now¹. Indeed, research goes back as far as the late 19th century, with efforts stepped up after the end of World War I to accommodate ideas from other countries. At that time, regular collaborations were initiated by the protagonists, education policies were discussed, concepts adapted, and further ideas were developed. Right from the outset, efforts to investigate and analyse developments in adult education on an international level revolved around an interest in other forms of adult education, based on the premise of learning from others and fostering international and intercultural openness in relation to national structures. Cultural, historical, social, political and economic models and approaches all rely on contexts, which is why efforts to directly transfer ideas from overseas into a domestic system are often viewed with scepticism. Up until recently, the international and international comparative adult education research community followed this convention. However, its tendency to idealise foreign practices and discourse is now met with similar scepticism.

In 1981, Joachim H. Knoll 1981 observed that *"awareness of international dependencies, international influence, and cross-fertilisation is greater outside of the Federal Republic of Germany; indeed, the Federal Republic of Germany is yet to make any attempt to review adult education on an international level"* (2p. 6). A great deal has happened since that time, giving rise to the question of the role of international (comparative) adult education research in Germany. Where have perspectives changed and broadened? In the past, research tended to focus on Scandinavia, the UK and the US, but nowadays the net is cast further to include other European countries (also supported by cooperations involving international research networks such as ESREA and ISCAE) as well as Africa, South America, the Indian subcontinent, China and South Korea. However, this also runs the risk of globalisation becoming a buzzword used in the battle for research grants and career moves. What additional value do we actually gain from research?

These preliminary reflections on the state of the discussion on international perspectives in adult education science raise the following questions:

- What value is currently attached to international and international comparative issues and research within the German-speaking adult education research community? And what are their underlying intentions?
- What past developments (objectives, functions, etc.) in terms of the globalisation of adult education continue to play a role today?
- What are the characteristics of an international comparison? And what questions arise here in terms of method and methodology?

Consequently, this involves a review of the domestic research landscape.

- How is the relation defined by international education policy and research?
- What is the importance of European and international education policy? And what influence does it have on corresponding research perspectives?

This pertains to externally induced research issues and, in a broader sense, their (invisible) governance, i.e. outside perspectives on research.

- Where and how does general discourse lead to issues for international and international comparative research? Examples here include lifelong learning, literacy and basic education, global (citizenship) education, education for sustainable development and transformative learning.

¹ This is also reflected in the various annual conferences organised by the Division for Adult Education (1992, 1999, 2007, 2015, 2018; cf. <https://www.dgfe.de/sektionen-kommissionen-ag/sektion-9-erwachsenenbildung/tagungen> [in German]).

² Knoll, Joachim H. (1981). International Adult Education and its influence on the Federal Republic of Germany [Internationale Erwachsenenbildung und ihr Einfluß auf die BRD]. Volume. 2, Fern-Universität in Hagen

- What theoretical references and methodological approaches are enriched on and by an international level (e.g. transformative learning; international comparative research)?
- Have these references and approaches changed over time? Are there any new developments and priorities? Have there been any shifts in challenges and new (old) limits, e.g. hegemonial influences?

These questions arise against the backdrop of incalculable transformations of educational systems, which have to deal with social, economic, ecological as well as many other changes and influences due to internationalization. Both reactive and anticipatory strategies are called for and developed, which adult education-academia as well as its practices.

We would like to invite you to submit proposals for the upcoming conference. In addition to proposals for individual contributions, we would also like to request proposals for panel discussions on specific topics with three or four related contributions. These panel discussions will enable a concise yet in-depth exchange on each topic.

Please only submit unpublished contributions (or which have only been published in part) which have a clear link to the theme of the conference, which raise a question clearly linked to the initial situation and current state of research and theory, which explain the methodology and argumentation involved, and which present the (interim) results.

Please submit the following ahead of the conference:

- An abstract for an individual contribution (max. 2,500 characters) or
- An abstract for a panel discussion along with your suggestion for the main subject, as well as up to four panel discussion contributions (max. 10,000 characters).

Deadline for submission is **01.04.2021**. Please use only Conftool for submission:

<https://www.conftool.com/eb2021/>

All abstracts undergo a review process based on the above criteria. You will receive feedback on your submitted abstract at the end of April 2021.

For further information, please contact:

Conference: <https://www.hsu-hh.de/wb/en/ae2021>

Attention:

Contributions already positively reviewed in the 2020 call retain (if desired under moderate update and revision) the status as accepted contributions for 2021.

Please log in to Conftool again and check if anything has changed at your institution or your contact details.

We look forward to receiving your submissions!

The Chair of the Adult Education Division:

Bernd K  pplinger, Anke Grotl  schen, Gabriele Molzberger

and the local organising committee

Sabine Schmidt-Lauff, Christine Zeuner