

What's new in Europe? Recent Trends in Adult and Continuing Education

Colleagues from various European countries were invited to an international lecture series at the University of Duisburg-Essen to talk about trends in adult and continuing education. Looking back on this lecture series, we intend to examine different approaches to the term "trend" as well as to outline results of current research in adult and continuing education. We will then give an overview of main arguments of the essays presented in the following. Finally, common trends in European adult and continuing education are drawn out.

1. Research Activities in the Field of Adult and Continuing Education

The German Institute for Adult Education (DIE) and the Department of Adult Education at the University of Duisburg-Essen conducted research on recent trends in adult and continuing education in recent years. While researchers at the DIE worked on a trend analysis of adult and continuing education in Germany, the University of Duisburg-Essen addressed this issue together with colleagues from various European universities from an international point of view. The results of this research have just recently come out. Firstly, the DIE (2008) published its study on "Trends der Weiterbildung" which gained sizeable public interest, and secondly, the University of Duisburg-Essen held an international lecture series on the topic Trends in Adult and Continuing Education in Europe in the winter semester 2007/08.

In cooperation with the DIE, this course of lectures has been offered for the second time. It was developed in the context of the European Master in Adult Education (EMAE) which is part of the common core curriculum of the EMAE-universities.¹ Experts from various European countries were invited to present their research on the topic of adult and continuing education from their national point of view for the lecture series. The presentations were followed by an open discussion. At the same time, all sessions were streamed out live on the internet with open access to the public. This proved to be extremely successful as around 100 users from 11 countries followed the lectures².

1 Within the project European Master in Adult Education (EMAE), a curriculum for a European Master Programme in Adult Education has been developed between 2004 and 2007. A common core curriculum was implemented at the University of Duisburg-Essen (Germany) and at the West University of Timișoara (Romania). In 2008/09 further European universities plan to follow, e.g. the University of Florence (Italy). For further information on the EMAE-project see Egetenmeyer/Lattke (2007).

2 Videos of the International Course of Lectures are still available on the platform Moodle at the University Duisburg-Essen as well as on DVD (Nuissl/Egetenmeyer/Strauch 2008). Access to the internet platform is open to the public and can be obtained by contacting the authors: regina.egetenmeyer@uni-due.de or strauch@die-bonn.de.

Seven researchers from European countries took part in the series. These included Ekkehard Nuisl von Rein (Germany) from the hosting institution and Esther Oliver (Spain) who was guest professor at the University of Duisburg-Essen at the time. In addition, the following experts presented their research: Marta Ferreira (European Commission) on general trends in the European Union, Henning Salling Olesen (Denmark) on the Danish situation, Eero Pantzar (Finland) on political trends in his country, Simona Sava (Romania) on the difficulties of an educational system that is still in transition, and Alan Tuckett (Great Britain) on the state of art in British adult and continuing education. The experts' mission was to examine and describe some of the following aspects from their national points of view: legislation, educational institutions, financing, provision, participation, staff, research and higher education, and international contacts. What they finally all provided was an understanding of general trends in adult and continuing education.

In order to document these results, the participants were asked to submit their contributions for publication. It is with pleasure that we can now present some of these results in this volume of REPORT, with essays on Spain, Romania, Finland, Great Britain, and Germany.

In the following section, we will examine the term "trend" as it is used in colloquial language as well as in academic discourse, then continue by extracting some essentials from the research presented, and finally try to identify commonalities.

2. Exploring Trends in Adult and Continuing Education

In colloquial language, a trend is understood as a general directional tendency of movement such as a new view in society, economy or technology, triggering a new move or direction. Fundamental changes in trends as well as implementations of new trends are found regularly in the fashion industry, for example.

Due to the overall interest in the directions where specific processes or systems are heading, there are various means of tracking these, including trend observation, analysis and estimation. Trend estimation is the application of statistical techniques to make and justify statements about trends in a specific field. A series of measurements of a process has to be treated as a time series. It is possible to construct a model to explain the behaviour of the measurement in order to obtain information on increasing or decreasing moves.

Generally, trends can be observed, but they are more difficult to measure and identify in advance. Nevertheless, there are a number of approaches which address new directions and moves in nearly every sector as, of course, in the field of adult and continuing education, too. So what can be said about trends in adult and continuing education?

2.1 Who is dealing with Trends in Adult and Continuing Education?

There is a multitude of approaches to analysing trends in the field of adult and continuing education, and countries, institutions and policy makers all deal with trends. Most studies carried out to identify trends in the field of adult education and adult learning are based on existing studies and surveys. These include national efforts and trend reports as well as international studies which mostly examine the current state of the art in different fields of adult and continuing education. In these studies, the main trends in adult and continuing education are described and conclusions for the future are made.

Looking at who is dealing with trends in adult and continuing education on an international level, we can point to the study "Adult Education Trends and Issues" which was carried out by the members of the European Association for Education of Adults (EAEA) in 2006. In this study, experts from European countries worked together. The team included the Deutscher Volkshochschulverband (DVV) and the European Research and Development Institutes for Adult Education (ERDI).

One of the older studies in this context is the report on an international seminar on "World Trends in Adult Education Research" compiled by the UNESCO Institute for Education in 1994. In this study, research trends in the field of adult and continuing education in Africa, Arab States, Asia, Europe, North America and Latin America were analysed (UNESCO Institute for Education 1999).

In addition to these international studies, there are others analysing trends in adult and continuing education within one specific area or country. Many countries carried out some kind of trend report or trend analysis in the past few years, and there are a number of reports from various institutions and countries (e.g. for Canada: Peters 2004, for France: Isambert 2005, for India: Dutta 2005, for Germany: DIE 2008).

As showed above, there have been various efforts to analyse trends in adult and continuing education initiated by different bodies. Nearly all approaches regarding trends in adult and continuing education share a common method: the identification, collection and analysis of existing sources and data, either national or international. Another common factor is that these studies normally focus on the outcome, access and quality of adult and continuing education practices in dealing with challenges and perspectives.

2.2 Approaches on Trends in Adult and Continuing Education

If we look at existing approaches to trends in adult and continuing education in more detail, we can see that they differ according to the objectives and understanding of the term "trend". In consequence, a variety of approaches are to be found including

those analysing trends as development, attempting estimation of trends, seeing trends as trend-setting or deriving trend issues.

The analysis of different approaches regarding trends in adult and continuing education shows that the experts are working with various understandings of the term “trend” and stress different trends in adult and continuing education on different levels of abstraction. This essay will analyse different views on trends in adult and continuing education in Europe. It will explain the use of different approaches, and show the resulting variety of views on trends in adult and continuing education. For this purpose, we looked at the discourses mentioned above in the literature, the International Course of Lectures, and the essays in this volume of REPORT.

Trend as Development

One approach to trends is to look at the development in a specific area in the past years. By doing this, one can get an insight into the tendencies and look at direction(s) in a specific area. This approach is often used as a starting point for other approaches which we will describe later.

In the International Course of Lectures the experts looked at trend developments from several viewpoints: one view is based on political developments, which affects adult and continuing education, e.g. European and national policies during the last years. Another view on trend developments is based on the development of societies, e.g. the transition from plan to market in Romania. Yet another view on trend developments is based on the analysis of the statistical data available on adult and continuing education which shows the concrete development in one particular country.

Trend as Estimation

Trend estimation indicates a description of the further development in a specific field. Here, trends are understood as an outlook for future developments. Trend estimation is carried out in several ways, as examples in the literature and the International Course of Lectures show.

The study “Trends der Weiterbildung” (DIE 2008) looks at future trends in Germany based on former developments. The analysis of available statistical data in adult and continuing education in Germany is used as a basis for this. Trend analysis gives an estimation of which direction a specific development is going to tend towards.

As Marta Ferreira (2008) stated during her presentation at the International Course of Lectures, Europe faces a “demographic time-bomb” with plunging birth rates and an ageing population posing a real threat to economic prosperity over the next 20 years:

“14 million more older people, 9 million fewer younger people, 2 million fewer learners in Vocational Education and Training, future labour markets will rely more on older workers and migrants”. On the basis of these expectations future strategies for adult and continuing education are to be laid out.

Trend as Trend-Setting

This approach is best described as setting goals and targets to be reached in the next years. These set trends can then be understood as the desired outcome and thereby provide a starting-point for specific developments in adult and continuing education in the future.

In the literature one can find a variety of political approaches that deal with trends in a broader sense as trend-setting. Nearly all studies that give political recommendations can be mentioned in this context as they attempt to set targets. One of these is, for example, the OECD-study of 2005 “Promoting adults learning” (OECD 2005). The main purpose of this report is to gather the key policy lessons from 17 OECD country reviews. This notably identifies the different countries’ approaches to improving access to and participation in adult learning.

An analogous approach can also be found in the International Course of Lectures, for example, in the references to policy documents, e.g. to the Lisbon-Goal of the EU or to national strategies and development plans in lifelong learning. EU-Benchmarking provides other common goals. The EU sets concrete benchmarks for several educational areas, which should be reached in all European countries until 2010.³ Another example of a trend-setting approach is the target of changing adult and continuing education from a remedial to a transformative concept in Spain. Finally, an important perspective of trend-setting is that of identifying competencies that will be necessary in the future.

Trend as Issue

Another approach to trends is to show which challenges can be identified. Here trends present future perspectives, and from these perspectives, the challenges for societies are deduced and the impact of these challenges for adult and continuing education is assessed.

This approach can be found in the EAEA-study. Here, the objective was to carry out a review of national regulatory frameworks, structures and practices, including statistics

³ For example, according to such an EU-benchmark, 12.5 percent of adults participating in this survey are expected to have taken part in an AE-programme within four weeks prior to the survey. In 2000, average participation in the European Union was 7.1 percent, and in 2006 it was 9.6 percent (Commission of the European Communities 2007).

providing indicators on rates of participation and provision, the emphasis being on recent political statements on needs and priorities (EAEA 2006). The results of the EAEA are mainly political recommendations, implications and requirements for action.

In the International Course of Lectures experts identified the challenges which have arisen through immigration or emigration in their countries, as well as economic and social challenges.

3. Trends in selected European Countries

The approaches mentioned above regarding trends in adult and continuing education differ according to objectives and context. The same applies to the presentations the lecturers gave within the International Course of Lectures and their explanations in the following essays. It is important to note that trends must always be seen in the context of different countries' approaches and historical traditions with regard to adult and continuing education. An important factor, too, is that different values, priorities and the different use of terms influence the analysis of trends. However, although the backgrounds are different, it is possible to single out some major trends in adult and continuing education. Evidence for this is amply provided in the articles dealing with recent trends in adult and continuing education in this volume of REPORT.

Esther Oliver's contribution analyses the trend towards democratization in Europe. Her contribution is structured in three parts. The first deals with the theoretical framework of democratization as applied in adult and continuing education. In the second, research development is reviewed. Here she explains the process of democratization through adult and continuing education which is occurring in different contexts. In the third part she analyses the specific process of adult and continuing education practice in Spain. Esther Oliver demonstrates that various efforts towards democratization are being carried out worldwide, and as such, these can be seen as indicators of this trend. The aim is to overcome inequalities within decision-making processes in adult and continuing education. In addition, she gives specific examples of how democratic participation in adult and continuing education can be promoted in a specific context and how to achieve greater inclusion.

Simona Sava refers to the Lisbon process 2010, claiming that it will entail intensive changes and focused efforts in all sectors of society in Romania. The policy priorities here lie in the development of the vocational training system for adults. Simona Sava talks about trends in a diversified array of institutions in Romania, national systems of quality assurance and accreditation of prior experiential learning, increased funds and increased awareness and know-how for adult and continuing education. As in the other contributions, Simona Sava also denotes varying political aims, notably in the national plan against poverty and for promoting social inclusion. She also talks about the low participation of adults in education and learning, one of the lowest in Europe.

Furthermore, she explains the trend of a diversified range of institutions, the trend towards professionalism and a strong tendency towards internationalization of adult and continuing education. One of the main challenges and difficulties in Romania is that, at present, there is as yet no articulated policy for general adult and continuing education and no national strategy for lifelong learning.

Eero Pantzar analyses one particular trend in detail. Rather than identifying a series of trends in Finland, he has chosen one trend that seems to be most important for this country: the trend of citizens not being interested in participating in elections, in membership of political parties and further activities of representative democracy. From there, he derives the challenge of finding methods to foster civic participation and lifelong learning. He examines the guidelines and objectives of political and citizenship education in Finland and gives his attention to the question of how active and democratic citizenship is learnt and how it is taught.

Alan Tuckett introduces his essay by asking what is to be done about the education of adults in Great Britain. The background here, as in all countries, is the importance of giving adults opportunities to obtain vocational skills which will improve their lives, and a generous and inclusive government policy. Looking at trends in adult and continuing education, Alan Tuckett focuses on participation. Not only in Great Britain, but in other countries as well, participation in learning is strongly associated with social class groups. Here, he touches on a wider discussion of the participation trend in adult and continuing education. He observes that participation seems to depend not only on social class, but also on prior educational experiences, current work status, age, and migration issues. These aspects have a major impact on whether or not adults participate in informal, non-formal or formal learning. He talks about the challenge of creating a learning society and increasing social inclusion. A major part of his essay is dedicated to the verifiable health benefits of learning and the impact that these can have on society as a whole.

The benchmarking criteria of the EU, which set out targets in the Lisbon Goals, build the basis of the discussion on trends and policy in an international context. *Ekkehard Nuissl* refers to this in his essay when he talks about a relatively high participation target for continuing education for 2010. He describes different trends as trend estimation for Germany. With regard to financing he talks about significant changes due to the decrease in public funding. He also refers to increasing cooperation as well as competition between adult and continuing education institutions in Germany. Another trend he explains is the greater need for information and counselling which is the result of new forms of learning. The most important feature in this respect applies to the support of participants in the selection of, and decision to take part in programmes and courses. The need for more information and counselling appears to be gaining in importance as course structures of programmes in Germany change, generally providing more modules with shorter duration. Nuissl talks about two more important trends, to do with changes in employment in the adult and continuing education sector on the one

hand, and participation structures, on the other hand, in the light of social inclusion – especially for special groups such as the educationally disadvantaged and older participants.

4. Summary

Most of the studies included in this compilation share a common core that harks back to some major issues. The different aspects of trends in adult and continuing education refer most of all to legislation, financing and infrastructure, to participation in adult and continuing education, and to demographic challenges and migration. Nearly all the approaches aim to give an overview of different aspects of trends in adult and continuing education. The aims and challenges mentioned in the studies pinpoint lifelong learning requirements and stress that lifelong learning requires recognition from governments, and that needs must be embedded into appropriate policies.

Summarizing the trends the authors have identified, we can single out some common factors that can be denoted as main trends. All essays refer to participation in adult and continuing education in general, to social exclusion/inclusion, to professionalism in the field of adult and continuing education, to financing, to new forms of learning, and to internationalization.

All these references can be seen as ways to increase participation rates in adult and continuing education. In all contributions, low participation rates are noted, especially for two specific groups: the older and the unemployed. Against the background of the demographic challenges with which all European countries are confronted, increasing of the participation rate is equally a common and key mission for all. As Allan Tuckett states, this is an important task, not only in the context of a competitive global economy, it is also essential to ensure social cohesion in our societies.

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