

and ensuring financial support, Erasmus Mundus may be one of them. Reaching beyond Europe is an inevitable challenge which we have to face. We need to answer this call of globalization being aware that it serves the best interest of European and worldwide AE.

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## International Projects and Comparative Adult Education. The Example of EBiS

### 1. Introduction

For many centuries people showed interest in education and learning in other countries and continents (Titmus, 1996, Savicevic, 2003). From merely curiosity, it moved to cultural and educational borrowing and attempts to learn from others in order to improve the practice of education based on comparisons with other practices. As Reischmann points out: "While the international aspect in adult education and onto adult education has a long tradition, only a small and limited access to adult education is done comparatively" (Reischmann, 1999, p. 12). But it is just the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century that brought about massive joint efforts, common activities and even increased activity in regional and international projects in the area of adult education. The relationship between those two approaches might be considered first as a terminological and conceptual one, and second as a practical one. We will not try to enter this discussion (see numerous books and papers of the authors like: Alexander Charters, Roby Kidd, John Henschke, Colin Titmus, Dusan Savicevic, Paolo Federighi, Peter Jarvis, Jost Reischmann) but to show that these approaches are rather more complementary than exclusive and show this relationship with concrete examples of regional projects from South-East Europe.

Although some authors believe that this is a tensed relationship, Titmus (1996, p. 682) states that comparative education "make ritual obeisance to adult education" and usually tended "to reflect the changing preoccupations of national and international authorities rather than of people at the grassroots level" (ibid, p. 684), however, this might change in the course of dynamic social developments and globalisation. Especially, recent European developments in education

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Source: Reischmann, Jost (ed) (2006): "On Becoming an Adult Educator - historical and contemporary aspects". Bamberg. <http://andragogy.net/conference2006.htm>

and learning prove that comparative adult education nowadays could have stronger links to international projects in two-fold way:

- The value of educational projects can be substantially increased by using the information and knowledge available in comparative studies, theories and approaches. Many times mistakes in projects, costing a vast amount of time and money, result in failure, because the knowledge, findings and principles available in comparative adult education were not used.
- Making use of the results of international experiences would be beneficial to the quality and effectiveness of international projects (see for example Samlowski, 2002). Many highly regarded comparative studies are the result of the sharing of international experiences. A practical reason should be considered as well: Financial resources available for practical projects are incomparable bigger than those invested into scientific comparative studies of adult education. A change from some years ago is that “most of the empirically based research is nowadays performed not only within the traditional research institutes such as universities, but also in agencies, institutes and working collectives of international and supranational organizations” (Knoll, 1999, p. 27). Therefore, available data, experience obtained and lessons learned in the projects should be a valuable source for comparative studies. They could also contribute to an increase of qualitative and interpretative approach and comparative studies.

An additional reason for the shared use of international project data is the fact that regional and international projects are seldom limited to merely improving adult education in one country or region. Generally, they include strong conceptual components and at least preliminary studies that can serve as a guide for planning of practical activities in other countries or regions.

## 2. DVV international – EBiS project: some facts

DVV international (previously IIZ/DVV) is an institute of DVV – German Adult Education Association, which unites about a thousand adult education centres in Germany, called *Volkshochschulen*. The head office of the Institute is in Bonn, with offices, partner organizations and projects all over the world, particularly in less developed regions.

Societal problems are no longer restricted to single countries. Unemployment, illiteracy, questions of multicultural society, social

mobility and participation in democracy are matters best dealt with at a transnational level. Most of IIZ/DVV activities comprise several countries simultaneously, thus weaving a network which includes the entire region. In addition, this facilitates an international exchange of experience and best practice (IIZ/DVV, 2006).

Due to the political changes in South Eastern Europe, DVV international established the network of offices and partner organisations in almost all the countries in this region. As the Stability Pact project (supported by the German Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation and the German Foreign Office), the EBiS project (abbreviation from the German: *Erwachsenenbildung in Südosteuropa – Adult Education in South Eastern Europe*) was developed in order to help maintain the peace, to support democracy and economic prosperity via adult education. Further more, this helps (re)building and modernising the systems and structures of adult education in the countries in transition, and the dissemination of the EU policy of lifelong learning and the goals defined in “Education for All – Dakar Framework”. Thus the project enables international exchange, supports regional cooperation and the European integration processes.

Shortly after the political changes in 1989, the project started in a few countries. With political and economical developments, the number grows. The countries participating in the project or their role in the project changed. The following countries and regions have or are now taking part in the project: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Kosovo, Slovenia.



The EBiS-project is designed to impact on three levels: national, cross-border and regional. Thanks to the strong cooperation with local providers, educational authorities and experts, the EBiS project meets the local needs to a large extent. Various areas are covered: literacy and basic education, vocational adult education and training, teaching and learning methods, professionalisation of adult education and train-the-trainer, lobbying for lifelong learning etc. At the same time, exchange and cooperation are developed via common, regional projects. Some of the projects are: History (Reconciliation, human rights and methods of teaching history), SMILE (Multiethnic and intercultural learning experience), European certification in adult education and learning (Xpert ECP, Xpert PBS, EBCL), Education for disadvantaged groups, common participation in some EU-projects (Socrates – Grundtvig, Leonardo), organizing Adult Learner's Weeks and Lifelong Learning Festival etc.

### 3. EBiS project: questions arising

Long-term projects like EBiS are really a big challenge both for project management and for the researcher: Several countries and regions, with some similarities, but more differences, are all under the roof of adult education, which reflects those differences more than any other area of education. Especially when the aims are so ambitious. It is rather hard to run the project and to have success both on national and regional levels without some principles and knowledge from the area of comparative adult education. Under the motto: "Learning from each other – learning for the future" this network was confronted with a two-sided task: On one hand to develop national adult education systems, concentrating on specific, local needs, meeting them via education. While on the other hand, there is a need for levelling, balancing out and making certain adjustments that can enable intensive cooperation and exchange. There is a long list of questions and problems arising in this kind of project – a few examples:

- How developed should/could the national system of adult education be in order to enter into regional and international cooperation? Some of the countries included in project were at the start of the development process when the project began, for example Albania, was without a tradition in adult education. Obviously there was need to support national adult education, to build up structures, to establish institution and organisations. After that, the country could intensively participate in the regional

activities and contribute to them permanently and fruitfully, which is the case today. Of course, an open question is the set of criteria or indicators to measure and evaluate the state of development – both for the level of general development and for adult education.

- A similar question is: What are the requirements for political stability of the country or region that are needed to start fruitful support of adult education and regional exchange. This applies for example to Kosovo. The first attempt to start the EBiS project there was not very successful, because shortly after the war it was hard to: first – use adult education to reform the country and to support democratic development and not use it for political purposes, secondly: how to reach the level of tolerance and understanding among the neighbouring regions and countries which would make cooperation possible. The second attempt (a few years later) was successful and makes Kosovo an integral part of the project.
- The issue of the relationship between the political climate and adult education seems to be eternal one and did play/plays an important role also in the EBiS project. Serbia could be taken as an example. The project started during the period of Milosevic's regime which made the project activities difficult in several ways. The main question was: Is it possible to support adult education in a country, without at the same time supporting the regime, even if just indirectly? Is it possible to do it via NGOs and avoid state providers, or should just they be the target for the project activities? If only the adult education outside the formal system and state provider is supported, how can the project results be sustainable? This partly became a question in later stormy political developments in Serbia, which raises again the question often discussed in comparative adult education – the role of the state and adult education (*cf.* Pöggeler, 1990). Comparative adult education research might profit from engaging in this dynamic area, where cumulated experiences allow for the drawing of some conclusions.
- In regions that have been through turbulent political changes, and still face serious political problems, it is impossible to free adult education from political influences. But how could this be done without peril to the project and jeopardize its "neutrality", is it possible even to use the political tensions to raise the awareness about the need for adult education and lifelong learning? Since the EBiS project covered all the territory of former Yugoslavia, the

risks were always present and issues to be dealt with were numerous, like: Where to settle the regional office (a question which could be luckily solved by choosing Bulgaria)? What status should the DVV-office in Prishtina have and how far could it be supported from Tirana considering the unsolved disputes with Serbia? What is the best way to cooperate with adult education providers in regions where national minorities live, like in the Serbian Republic in Bosnia and Herzegovina? How to make a smooth transition from the period when activities in Montenegro were run from Belgrade to the period after independence and how to continue efficient work and fruitful cooperation?

Comparative adult education might help find the approach to these risks and issues. Maybe even the history of adult education can contribute with some knowledge and experiences from the rich history of turbulences that adult education had in different periods and various regions.

- Probably one of the most discussed issues, since the very beginnings of comparative research in education is the question: What could be transferred among the countries and regions? It is well known that pure copying can not give the desired results and this approach has been abandoned. Still, it is helpful to analyze what could be “borrowed” or “copied” in the area of adult education, under which conditions and circumstances, and to what extent could the results be predicted. The attempt to find common topics and interests and to share best practice was important for the countries participating in the EBiS project.

Because of the differences among the countries, combined with political tensions, it wasn't easy to define common ground and sharable preconditions for the project work. What is the level of similarities needed for that countries to cooperate and exchange good experiences – in general and particularly in the field of adult education? What type of experiences and practices can be transferred, and where are there limits and preferences? Those questions marked some know-how transfer among Slovenia, Romania and Serbia in the area of counseling and guidance; similarly it marked attempts to improve the University education of andragogical personnel via exchanging programs and experts, and some of the regional projects. One of the key questions is: What is more relevant when countries are entering into regional cooperation, what is critical when a country decides to learn from the experience of others? If we take Serbia as an example, what

criteria “promises” the best outcome in this process – similar general and political climate and developments (Croatia), reached level of European integration (Albania), similar adult education tradition (Slovenia) ...? But at a certain point, it seems that political relationships and unsolved problems overwhelm the priority and overshadow all other criteria. Again, the issue of “neutrality” of adult education could be raised.

- An issue relevant not just for EBiS, but also for European and international adult education, is the mutuality in the exchange process or in cultural borrowing. Usually it is a one-way road: The less developed countries learn from more developed (South from North, East from West ...), and very seldom in the opposite direction. But in adult education the opposite direction might make sense, especially in the case of some countries of the former Yugoslavia, where the level of general development is not in accordance with the traditions in adult education: This specific experience could provide interesting material for further research.
- There is one more topic which is relevant for theoretical discussion and scientific research in comparative adult education, which at the same time represents one of the most difficult problems in managing international projects: The relationship between national identity and adult education. The EBiS project faced this challenge in several ways, but mostly because of the newly (re)emerged identities of the countries and nations who become independent after the breakdown of Yugoslavia. Although the other participating countries (Albania, Romania, Bulgaria) were also very much preoccupied with their “new, post-communism” identity, the problem was bigger among those who are shaping their own identity by explicitly pointing out differences to the ‘Others’ (or even inventing them), especially the neighboring countries. There seems to be both positive and negative aspects of comparison: The permanent comparison with the Others, either for sake of defining their own identity, or just because of competitiveness, might be used as a driving force in reforms of education (numerous successful international projects prove that), but very often it presents a risk for exchange and cooperation (Pöggeler, 1995).
- An interesting resource for analysis is the introduction of European certification systems in all EBiS countries. The results were, as expected, very different, but not in expected way. The certification was more successful, not in the countries with more

developed adult education, but with a strong and decisive orientation to the European integration processes. But could it be predicted and applied on all quality assurance steps, measures and projects? For example, is it possible to foresee the future of EQF in those countries?

- An everlasting question for adult education in various crisis situations is (Pöggeler & Yaron, 1991): Is it possible to use the crisis and undesirable events for the sake of adult education and lifelong learning? In the EBiS project this topic was mostly related to the war in former Yugoslavia, the communist past of the countries in the region, and more and more to the problems of transition, where lifelong learning is meant to assist them on an individual and social level and to surmount difficulties of transition and democratisation. Some methods for overcoming the tensions of intolerance and rivalry between participating countries have already been developed, but there is still a lot to be done in this area.
- Additional elements could influence the type of support for individual countries and their potential for cooperation within the project. There are countries with rich traditions in adult education, with significant potential remaining from former periods, but who lack awareness of the shortcomings, failures, and necessary change. They stick to the past and don't seem willing to accept changes in their paradigms (like Serbia and Croatia). On the other hand, there are countries with a less developed tradition of adult education and still in need for capacity building, but who are trying hard and are highly motivated to compensate for what they missed in previous periods, with a strong orientation to the learning processes and to the future (like Romania and Bulgaria). What could be the right approach for these different attitudes and how to combine them in the project which assumes the learning process as basic for cooperation? Raising this question to a more general level, researcher might ask: Are countries/states able to learn or is it more an individual process; what are the best premises for successful learning and how can adult education motivate this "jointly learning"?
- The continuing topic of European integration could be applied also to EBiS: Can we be united, together, and comparable, but still be specific and different? What are the areas where it is necessary to reach the unification (European quality standards, as EBiS example) and what should remain unique (approaching the target groups and lobbying for LLL, as EBiS example)? The more

countries and regions are involved, the more complex is it to draw the line between regional/European-common and national-specific. The question how diversity in international adult education should look is still open.

- There are numerous, well-know problems for of comparative researches in adult education which are valid for regional and international projects as well and should not be discussed in details: The jungle of adult education terminology, different conceptions, definitions and connotations, incomparable data, different politics, laws and national strategies etc.

#### 4. The contribution of international projects

The example of the EBiS project shows clearly that there are areas of regional and international activities that can be permanently improved by knowledge of comparative adult education.

On the other side, such projects can contribute:

1. to the reforms of adult education in single countries or region,
2. to the comparative adult education theory and research.

##### 4.1. Questions important for the reformer of education

"International efforts in adult education are often intended to inform and improve the practice of adult education, and to increase government interest in and support for adult education programs" (Duke, 2006, p. 696). For the purpose of reforms of adult education in a country or region, one could look at rich experiences from international projects (EBiS is one example) and various elements they were related to, providing the answers to at least some of the questions he/she is faced with:

- What are the main forces and decisive elements in the reform processes in the area of adult education (history, tradition, learning habits, political climate, economic tendencies, motivation, integration processes ...?)
- What level of economic and political stability and development is needed to start changing adult education?
- How far could one aspect or area of adult education and lifelong learning be developed without considering the whole context of the national (adult) education system?
- Could one aspect or area of adult education and lifelong learning be developed jointly with other countries, on regional/international level, isolated from other aspects and areas?
- What makes the efforts, changes and result sustainable?

- To what extent can adult education support or oppose political developments?
- What are the advantages and risks in cultural and educational “borrowing” / learning from the others?

Of course, for the purpose of the reform processes the answers for very specific, concrete issues can be obtained from this rich “project-source”, based on growing number of attempts, pilot/programs and “experiments”, various solutions for strategies, providers, curricula etc. The problem is still “the way of reading”, interpreting and using these results in individual countries.

#### 4.2. Questions important for comparatists:

There are numerous ways regional and/or international projects can contribute to comparative adult education. Some of them are:

- Providing information: Even single-nation studies provide a lot of useful information for comparison (approach commonly used by UNESCO, OECD, ETF, and CEDEFOP). Projects providing comparable data already gathered during the projects could offer even more.
- Showing regularities, tendencies and relations: Almost as a kind of scientific experiment, projects offer the possibility to test hypothesis, check the interdependences of various factors and prove the validity and consistency of influences.
- Discovering some specific fact or phenomena, things that are unique and thus valuable factors that make them distinctive.
- Finding and showing similarities and differences, therefore offering the possibility for valid explanation and interpretation. This could be very helpful when trying to understand the role of the context (particularly nation-state context) in the development of adult education.
- Enabling exchange and comparison – a possibility not very often given for comparative studies, make detailed analysis on the grassroots level possible, including participative research, which has a special value in adult education.

The list of issues and questions relevant for comparative adult education becomes longer when focusing on such projects. Based on the experiences of such projects comparatists could better deal with questions like:

- How developed should national Adult Education system be for regional/ international project: What are the criteria and indicators necessary to evaluate and judge?

- What types of data, criteria and indicators should be used?
- What are the preferred methods of analysis (quantitative/qualitative, case studies, juxtaposition...?)
- “Educational transfers” – when and how are they possible?

EBiS was mentioned as one possible example of “using” projects to develop theory and research in this scientific field, but there are many others as well. For example the International Society for Comparative Adult Education ISCAE is a leading force in comparative research, as its president Jost Reischmann states: “ISCAE wants to serve international comparison

- by supplying a network of contacts to other comparatists,
- by fostering exchange through conferences, and
- by documenting and sharing the developments and standards in publications” (www.ISCAE.org).

Another example is the European Association for the Education of Adults EAEA, which conducts projects (comparative as well as the other), but in addition serves very efficiently the comparative researches, fosters comparative use of national data and supports improvements of national adult education by using information and knowledge developed through comparative approaches.

#### 5. Some final questions

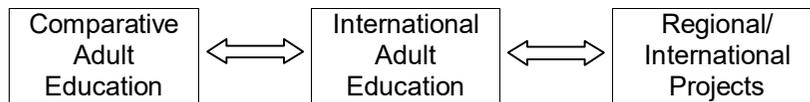
The list of areas and fields of adult education that could be discussed from an international and comparative point of view could be very long, but one of them seems to be of special relevance not only for the countries participating in EBiS projects, but also for other regions in Europe and the world:

- Is it possible to contribute to peace, tolerance and understanding in efficient and sustainable ways via cross border and international projects? Mr. Boris Trajkovski, President of the republic of Macedonia, said on the opening of DVV - Regional Lifelong Learning Festival in Skopje in October 2003: “May education be the bridge in our joint efforts to overcome barriers of time, space, and social, economic and political differences.” (Trajkovski, 2004, p. 90). Is this too ambitious and what could be done to make this wish more realistic?
- Is there a risk that the projects could make the situation even worse, for example by strengthening prejudices, imposing certain solutions and values, by making changes too fast, by misbalancing developments of certain areas in the society ...? Could comparative adult education create lists of such risks for

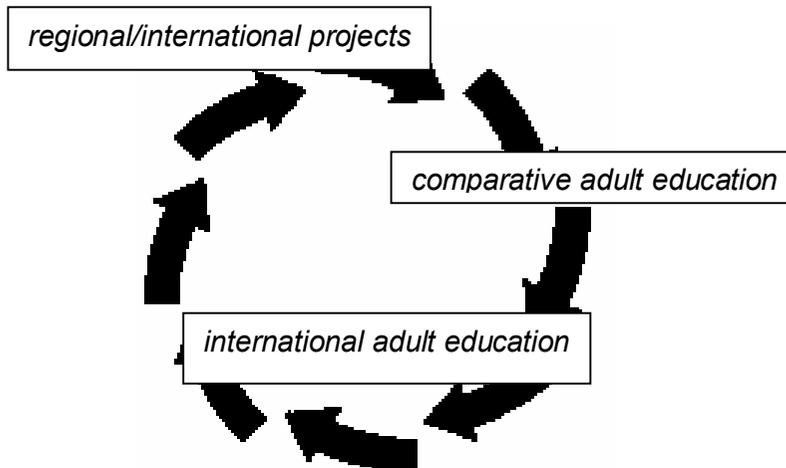
specific, various contexts, and develop approaches that could prevent this from happening?

- Could the European integration processes have been fostered by the fruitful and creative combination of regional/international projects and comparative studies and analyses? Such results have already been used for decision-making process in single countries; could they be useful for decision-making on the European level?

The scientific use of international projects and the practical value of comparative approaches and theories are, still, an open and fruitful area of discussion. This discussion may in future move towards an answer to the old terminological dispute – the one between “comparative adult education” and “international adult education”. “International adult education” seems nowadays to be placed more in the middle between the strict use of comparison as a method in adult education on one side, and international activities which use the results of it, aiming improvements of adult education and providing, vice versa, materials for the comparisons, on the other side. It could be discussed if it is rather the continuum with more theory on one pole and more practice on another:



Or a circle, with lots of exchanges and mutual interaction:



This is very similar to Heribert Hinzen’s use of “the notion of trinity”: “We urgently need support and stable union with those in the: Education policy, Science and Practices...” (Hinzen, 2004, p. 88). In a similar way, this “trinity” helps to overcome the limits and to “mobilise and strengthen the forces in individual countries that would be able to bring forward regional projects and networks” (ibid). We may add: With this “triple approach” the strength of single areas, approaches and results could be leveraged and contribute to a broad, all-embracing framework.

International adult education is sometimes defined in a way very similar to this model, as a phenomena taking two forms: “One is comparative studies, between rather similar or very different countries and systems... The second major form of exchange has focused on adult education as a form of aid for development...with the transfer both of resources, and of ideas and models of adult education...” (Duke, 2006, p. 697). Knoll underlines also the importance of country reports for the development of comparative adult education research (Knoll, 1999, p. 25). Some authors would talk more about “theoretical and applied comparative researches in education” or plead for holistic approach (e.g. Savicevic, 2003, pp. 267-269). This tendency seems to be a bit unexpected: The holistic approach might be the integration of project results, international activities, and comparative studies, but not under the umbrella of comparative education. This flow rather meanders through different, specific areas of adult education and lifelong learning, intensively improving some of them, using these combined efforts to meet the new emerged needs and challenges of contemporary times. Gruber (2001, p. 190) put it briefly as: “Networks are the Transnational Policy of the Future” – or we might say: at least the European policy in adult education, which should make more use of the project networks and theory based on their results.

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