

“ADULT LEARNING & COMMUNITIES IN A WORLD ON THE MOVE: BETWEEN NATIONAL TENSIONS AND TRANSNATIONAL CHALLENGES”

UNIVERSITY OF LOWER SILESIA, FACULTY OF EDUCATION,
WROCLAW, STRZEGOMSKA ST. 55

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Communities as a product of pedagogical action: adult education in cross-border-regions between national und European structures

Communities in adult education are defined as spaces or places, where social life or conflict happens (see CfP of this conference). Such definition refers to place in a manner that considers social space to be a container or a physical surrounding for events. However, recent studies on adult learning, in Germany (Bernhard et al., 2015; Stang et al., 2016) and Europe (Gualda et al. 2011; Steel et al. 2015), have fruitfully discussed social spaces as a dynamic interplay of symbolic meaning, physical context and social structure. Against this background, the paper uses a dynamic concept of social space and argues that an action-centered-geography-approach (Werlen, 1993) does enrich community education approaches and theories of adult learning, and furthermore provides a fruitful approach to investigate a world on the move between local, national, transnational or even global aspects of social life.

Based on an empirical research example from the author's PhD-Thesis, the paper investigates professional adult education practices, in cross-border regions at the peripheries of Germany. It reflects how professionals refer to tendencies of Europeanization in their day-to-day-professional practices, whilst simultaneously being part of a national or even federal education context. Two extracts from semi-structured interviews are presented, which were recorded in adult education centers in the Euroregion Neißة-Nysa-Nisa and Grandregion SaarLorLux.

These show how adult education managers and program planners legitimize their professional practices by referring to different national, local or European contexts. At the same time, the managers and program planners reveal their implicit normative concept of adult and community education, by referring to spatial contexts.

The paper takes a Grounded Theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Kelle & Kluge, 2010) approach in interpreting these two cases and uses an action-centered geography-perspective (Werlen, 1993). It shows that adult education practices do not only respond to socio-spatial structures, but also (re)produces community structures and places. On a more general level the paper finally suggests that crossborder-regions do provide examples, how to examine transnational and local movements, and their complex links between community learning (Steel et al., 2015), provider networks (Nemeth, 2015) and even European policies.

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