

“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

25TH – 27TH MAY, 2017

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Learning communities and Men's Sheds in Australia - reflection from European researchers

Key words: community learning, informal learning, Men's Sheds, Australia/New Zealand, ethnographic research

In Australia community learning takes place in different appearances as in Europe, due to different socio-cultural, ethnic and environmental features. Community houses and Men's Sheds were 'invented' in the local communities in Australia to overcome exclusion of local people of both sexes and to give 'freedom to actively shape and create new places that meet their particular interests and needs' (Golding 2015). In this paper we are particularly interested in the phenomenon of Men's Sheds as the learning communities and sites of informal learning in Australia (Foley, Golding & Brown 2008; Golding, Mark & Foley 2014; Schugurensky 2006). Our goal is to document, analyze and compare patterns of living and learning in different communities in rural and urban contexts in Australia (Victoria and Tasmania). In our paper we will put attention to gender and indigenous specifics of different communities regarding social inclusion and learning.

We will present results of the extensive 5 weeks terrain research on community learning in Australia. Our focus will be on multidimensional, life-based learning, initiated and being present in everyday's problem solving and struggling for better quality of life of community members. Research will be conducted from the end of January till the beginning of March 2017. We are planning to use the combination of qualitative methods. The basis will be the ethnographic approach, with active participation of authors and observation techniques, strongly linked with other qualitative methods (Larsson 2006; Riviera 2010). Data will be on one side gathered with the methods of visual ethnography, where we will use ethnographic photographs of community life, based on different contexts and realities, and on the other side, narratives and personal stories will be used for further investigation. We as researchers will rethink those complex community stories through autoethnographic approach and consequently try to evaluate multiple, situated knowledges, gained in different contexts and circumstances (Ellis & Bochner 2006; Muncey 2010; Golding & Foley, in print) through reflections of learning with and from others.

In our paper we will present collected data and rethinking from three perspectives: from objective perspective – knowledge and theoretical framing, based on literature study on community learning in Australia with the emphasis on Men's Sheds; from personal stories coming from the locals (particularly older men whom we will meet in Men's Shed and other communities in Australia (Victoria and Tasmania) and from subjective, autobiographical perspective – stories, interpreted by us, researchers. We expect to find interesting examples of problem based, life-oriented and experiential learning practices, being a result of everyday cooperation, mutuality and communication of local people.