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## **Adult Education in Germany : Roots, Status, Mainstreams, Changes**

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# Adult Education in Germany : Roots, Status, Mainstreams, Changes

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## History and Motives

Historians of adult education claim different times and traditions as the beginning of adult education in Germany :

Tietgens(1994) claims the reading societies(*Lesegesellschaften*) in the second half of the 18th century as an important root of the adult education idea. Intellectual citizens met and exchanged about art, science, and politics. Libraries were established and journals were discussed. These intellectual circles which often included contributions of the leading philosophers of that time are seen as the root of enlightenment in Germany. This tradition of enlightenment and humanism is still a basic idea of adult education in Germany today.

Roehrig(1975) refers to the workers' educational societies (*Arbeiterbildungsvereine*) in the first half of the 19th century. Here we find the motive that under-educated people meet and organize with the aim to overcome their intellectual poverty. The primary motive of workers for this development was emancipation through knowledge from being excluded from understanding the world and from being able to play a role on their own in this world. Later this

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motive changed more to emancipation through political action. Workers themselves often carried this movement, sometimes through philanthropic leaders and intellectuals.

Poeggeler(1992) points out the importance of the Catholic social movement founded in the first half of the 19th century by Adolph Kolping and its journeymen's association(*Gesellenvereine*) with their own houses for young workers not only for living, but also for further education in religion, vocation, and politics. Based on common religious values, learning and education took place in a social field, including work and leisure time activities, organized by the "Kolping-Family".

Bergeest(1995), in his thorough regional-historical study of Hamburg, noted different forms of vocational adult education in the 1700s : the Navigation School(1749), the Trade Academy (1767), and the Agricultural Learning Institution(1797). These and other institutions aimed to develop competencies of adults in a pragmatic way : to enable them either to do a job or to do a job better, and by this to secure their income.

These differences in defining the historical beginning of adult education suggest different perceptions of this field : Some authors insist that political emancipation through action in solidarity is the core of adult education. Others see intellectual enlightenment together with liberal-holistic development of all potentialities of the individual as "real" adult education. Some emphasize social, value—and religion-based themes. Yet others argue in favor of pragmatic and utilitarian justifications. Authors who advocate for one of these four roots generally disregard the others. Perhaps the conclusion is that the idea of adult education originates from different roots. Perhaps these different roots account for the sometimes confusing diversity observable today in German adult education and andragogy.

From the late 19th century to the early 20th century, adult

education provision in Germany may be described as "extensive" : The basic idea was to disseminate knowledge to as many people as possible; the central method was the lecture. With the advent of the orientation of "intensive" education, this "old direction" was criticized in the 1920s. In this "new direction" small groups worked together (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft*), discussed, and developed ideas and problems together. This democratic and person-oriented development was terminated with the Nazi-government in the 1930s. After the lost war in 1945 the four Allies installed in their respective occupied zones different activities for political re-education and adult education. This added new ideas and traditions to the already existing institutions and experiences. This also caused differences; for example, in the French occupied zone more emphasis was laid on cultural and liberal-arts education, in the Russian zone on political learning and institutionalized training for school qualification and vocational training.

In the 1960s the first legal statutes governing adult education were installed by some states of the Federal Republic of West Germany.

The 1970s can be seen as the beginning of a new phase in the development of adult education in Germany : the professionalization begins. While most adult education until this time was conducted with pride by volunteers and with little or no money, adult education began to outgrow the stage of sporadic leisure-time activity and became more of a field organized by professionals guided by developing professional standards. One study containing 14 case studies from various fields and institutions(Reischmann, 1988) documents basic changes in adult education in the 1970s : often the first full time staff was hired, institutions moved into their own buildings, new program types were installed, the financial basis changed, new institutions were founded, old institutions

extended and intensified their work. The staff in the West German *Volkshochschul*-Association grew from 1,214 in 1970 to 5,593 in 1986, business and industry investment in training increased from 2.1 billion Deutschmarks(DEM) in 1972 to 26.7 billion DEM in 1988. During this period it also became possible to study for the first time adult education at a university(See section 10).

### The Influence of the German Unification

A special chapter in the history of adult education in Germany concerns the role of adult education in and after the unification process. In 1989, after a series of protests from citizen groups throughout the Communist East Germany and the opening of the "Iron Curtain" by Hungary and Czechoslovakia followed by the dismantling of the Berlin wall, the German Democratic Republic DDR ceased to exist and merged into the Federal Republic of Germany BRD.

Some discussions have revolved around whether the political exchange in the East German citizen-movements and the learning in these self-organized protests, sometimes organized by church or cultural institutions as a sort of adult education, brought about the political change. However, it seems to be more unlikely that adult education was a major force that triggered this change.

Reunification offered an opportunity to merge the best features of the adult education systems of the two countries. Some branches of adult education in East Germany were highly developed and internationally respected; for example, distance learning, state-organized schooling for vocational re-training or for part-time college and university education, as well as culture-oriented activities(theater, music, etc.) for everybody. But this merging did not occur. The former East German adult education seemed in many

respects not to fit into the new administrative, organizational, and especially financial structure. As with most organized cultural, leisure-time, and educational activities, adult education had been centrally planned and executed by the communist state. In the new era the bureaucratic governmental administration no longer existed. So finally West Germany adult education was implemented in the former East Germany territory. This certainly meant the loss of possible variety and segments in adult education. As a result, many in the east were left with bitter feelings and the perception that they had been colonized by the west.

Political reorientation was one task, but the restructuring of the former communistic economy, which was not effective in a competitive world market, was and is a much more challenging and urgent task. Large-scale vocational training had to be implemented for more or less the whole workforce of East Germany. The promise was qualification for new jobs. These state-financed training programs were carried out by thousands of training institutions that suddenly appeared on the market and claimed to be competent for training. Not much is known about the quality of these training programs, but they fulfilled a sort of pacification function. They kept unemployed workers busy, structured their time, and kept their hopes alive that with enough qualifications jobs would be available for them. These hopes and promises often could not be fulfilled. Thus, adult education sometimes became something very ambivalent in the life and experience of these participants.

### Adult Education or Education of Adults?

Adult education, as it is understood in Germany, comprises various roots and traditions : liberal arts enrichment for developing individuals, enlightenment for emancipation and political understanding,

action, and empowerment, as well as value-based social education and improvement, and training for better performance in work and private life. Yet all of these activities were forms of intentional and planned education offered by institutions. Historians of adult education did not look for situations in which adults learned, but searched for institutions and organizations that enabled adults to learn, mostly in groups. Reflecting this perspective, in 1970 the *Deutscher Bildungsrat*, a high-ranked group of scholarly experts, defined "Adult education is the continuation or re-starting of organized learning after finishing a first education and an intermediate phase of working." (1970, 197).

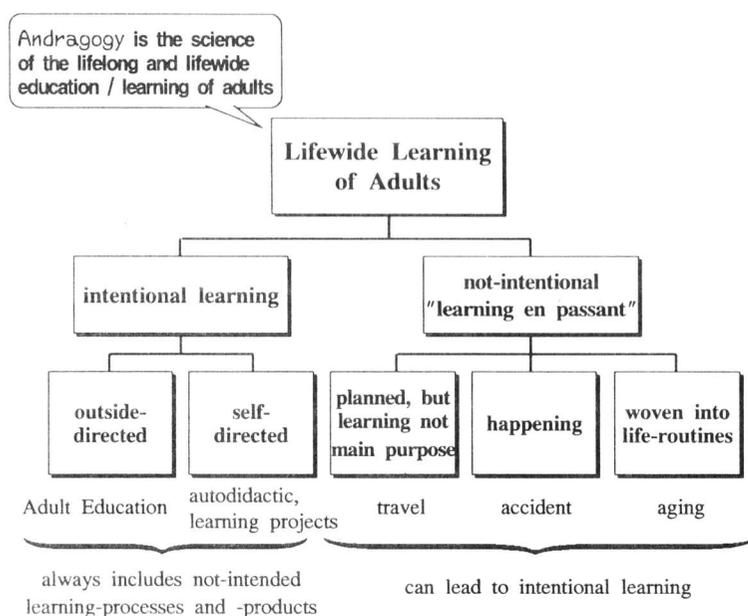


Fig 1. Structural scheme of adult learning and adult education

This restricted focus on organized and intentional learning became a point of criticism in a growing number of scientific discussions. It became increasingly evident that education and learning of adults occurs in many situations different from those offered by organizations offering teaching. In a theoretical perspective, the international discussion about deschooling society (e.g., by Illich), and humanistic psychology (e.g., Rogers), and in an empirical perspective, experiences from self-help groups and citizen initiatives (*Buergerinitiativen*) widened the perception and made clear that learning is not always dependent on teaching. This view of "lifewide learning" of adults encompasses not only intentional— institution organized and autodidactic—learning, but also partly intentional and unintentional learning that occurs simultaneously with activities not primarily aimed at learning (e.g., traveling), life situations that force learning (e.g., accident), and learning that results from various unidentifiable life-events (e.g., aging) (see Fig. 1). As a result, more attention in action and reflection is paid to learning in non-traditional settings outside institutions, to learning merged into life-, leisure-time-, or workplace-activities, to self-directed learning of individuals and groups. This expanded view of education has shifted the focus "from teaching to learning".

### Participation Statistics : on the Way to a Learning Society

In earlier decades no data were available about the level of participation in adult education. This is because adult education was seen as a more personal and local initiative carried out by numerous and not centrally registered institutions conducted and organized by volunteers not interested in statistics and paperwork, and with little or no financial resources. Today this would be called a "grassroots

movement".

One important segment of the adult education scene, the *Volkshochschul-Association (Deutscher Volkshochschulverband)* asked since 1962 its local member-institutions to report annually their participation statistics—thereby forcing the proud local institutions to collect certain data in a prescribed format. Every year these data indicated growth in numbers of courses, participants, and activities. But because the participation rates of the various other adult education providers were not reported, it has not been possible to draw conclusions about the general population.

Beginning in 1979 the West German federal ministry of education initiated every three years a representative study of participation in adult education. The central question was : "Did you participate last year in adult education?"

The 23% participation rate in 1979 was a positive surprise; this doubled to 48% in 1997 (Kuwan 1999). Participation in general adult education (e.g., health or hobby topics, languages) doubled from 16% in 1979 to 31% in 1997 and vocational adult education grew from 10% in 1979 to 30% in 1997.

The age-groups between 19 and 50 in 1997 showed similar participation rates (54%), in general (34%) as well as in vocational (35%) adult education. After the age of 50, participation declines in vocational education. For example, in 1997, 20% of the 60–64 year old adults participated in general education, but only 7% in vocational training. In contrast to the former West Germany, in the former communist East Germany, participation in general adult education was lower but higher in vocational education.

Very evident is the "Those who have more get more" principle. The more schooling or vocational education a person has or the higher the occupational position, the more he or she

participates in adult education. In 1997, 69% of the persons with university degrees participated, but only 24% of persons without vocational education participated. Women participate less than men do, but the difference has decreased. In 1979 it was 8%; in 1997 the difference was 2%.

Since the beginning of the 1990s attempts have been made to identify the "soft forms" of less formal vocational learning. But researching informal learning is fraught with methodological challenges. For example, it is difficult to distinguish between "learning" and "working". In the representative study previously referred to (Kuwan, 1999), 50% of the interviewed persons labeled quality circles as "mainly learning", but 39% as "mainly working"; the category "instructions by supervisors or co-workers" were labeled by 49% as "mainly learning", but by 45% as "mainly working". But even with some methodological challenges, the figures indicate the importance of this type of learning (see Table 1).

Table 1. Percentage of job-related informal learning (Kuwan, 1999, 58)

Type of job-related informal learning	1994	1997
Job-related reading	33	52
Self-learning by observation and trial	23	50
On-the-job learning by supervisors or co-workers	16	34
Self-directed learning with media	11	24

The popular perception of adult education is a positive one. Using learning opportunities as well for personal enrichment, job development, or practical needs in life is perceived today to be a "normal" and accepted, even prestigious activity for adults in

Germany. More than 90% agree that "Everybody should be ready for lifelong learning."

Research data show that Germans' attitudes towards adult education, in terms of both formal and informal learning, have become more positive in recent decades. In the last 20 to 30 years, due to various influences, adult education has experienced a process of intensification—more people have participated and have participated longer—as well as a process of diversification—more needs and more goals have been served. Germany seems to be on the way to becoming a learning society.

But experts also warn of a growing "knowledge gap". All data indicate that participation in learning activities is clearly higher in those segments of population that already have access to better opportunities. To counter such inequities, social, emancipatory, democratic, economic and pragmatic arguments are claimed to offer special learning opportunities to minorities, part-time or unemployed workers, blue-color workers, and persons with low school education.

Not much is being done to build an overall structure of adult education in Germany. Although information is exchanged and associations, publications, and conferences exist within the various segments of the field of adult education (i.e., *Volkshochschule*, churches, political state institutions, vocational and professional training, etc.), there is no national association that brings together all providers of adult education to exchange experience and to coordinate their work. No regular and representative joint conferences are held and the books and journals published about adult education usually address only their specific segment of the field. The field may be more characterized as one of parallel developments more than of interchange.

## A Bunch of Flowers : Institutions, Programs, Finances

Adult education in Germany is delivered through a high number of different institutions. In a representative study (*Bundesministerium ...*, 1996) the following main groups of institutions and participation rates were reported :

Table 2. Selected suppliers of adult education and training in Germany 1994. "Participation" means the percentage of all participation—cases in adult education, "volume" includes the participation as well as the hours spent in the program.

Institutions	Participation Volume
Companies, Employer	28 27
<i>Volkshochschulen</i>	16 10
(Vocational) Associations	11 12
Commercial Training Institutions	9 18
Churches	5 2
Colleges, Universities	4 5
Trade Union	2 1
Distance Learning	1 2
other	24 23

## Businesses and Employers

The largest providers of adult education in Germany are the companies/employers. By tradition, going back to the trade guild system of the Middle Ages, practically all businesses, crafts and trades in Germany train apprentices, thus leading young people to approved professions. This three years lasting vocational apprenticeship is even today a reliable basis for the competence of the workforce in Germany. Thus, education has always been a normal activity for employers and companies.

With the increasing demand to develop new products and to use new production techniques and equipment, demand has also increased for the retaining of adult employees. Depending on their size and type, continuing vocational training programs take place outside or inside the company, in short-term training programs or longer courses, part-time or full-time. Larger companies have established human resource development divisions. A rough estimation would be that per 1,000 employees one person has full-time responsibility for continuing vocational training. Although the majority of this training is targeted to specific demands of the workplace, large companies also offer general educational courses; for example, languages, mathematics, data processing, or communication skills. These courses are offered outside the working hours, while workplace related learning takes place during working hours. In Germany companies are not obligated by law—as in France or Italy—to invest a certain percentage of their total payroll costs in continuing education. Companies finance human resource development as a reliable way to equip staff with the competencies required to face future challenges. The "hire-and-fire-principle" of the American system, where workers are responsible for their own employability skills and can be easily replaced, is not a company

policy in Germany. The idea in Germany is more a mutual loyalty between company and employee. That company-sponsored education respects the interests of the employees as well as those of employers is assured by the "co-determination laws". These laws stipulate that a "work council" in each company, whose members are elected by their fellow employees, must be consulted on all measures which will influence the structure, form and content of training.

Workplace-related learning is offered also by other providers such as vocational associations and commercial training institutions. The volume in Table 2 shows that these types of learning often comprise extended periods of time (up to one year full time for example, in government-financed unemployment-programs).

## The Volkshochschule—Adult Education for Everybody

The most prominent and visible institution of adult education, spontaneously by most people equated with "adult education", available to everyone in Germany, is the community-based, non-profit institution, *Volkshochschule*. Tracing its history to more than a century to the enlightening ideas of Grundtvig's Danish adult education and to the Workers Education Cooperatives, the *Volkshochschule* has come over the years to incorporate a great variety of innovative ideas. Today the national network of Volkshochschulen is known and available to practically all adults and offers flexible and needs-oriented educational opportunities in a wide range of topics to everybody (e.g., languages : 29% of the program, health : 25%, creative : 14%, vocationally related courses : 15%, political issues : 3%). In 1997 the 1002 local *Volkshochschulen* nationwide had 8,252 full-time staff. Through this staff and their hourly-paid-part-time teachers, the *Volkshochschulen* offered

516,509 courses to 6.4 million participants plus 77,000 lectures with 2.5 million participants.

The local *Volkshochschulen* have a unique legal status. Either they are part of the local city administration (about two thirds), yet with a high degree of independence, or they are independent educational societies (about one third) which include city authorities on their advisory boards. State and city government funding cover about 60% of the costs of the *Volkshochschulen*; participants pay the remaining 40%.

Decisions about program, contents, finances, and activities are in the responsibility of the local *Volkshochschule*. The federal and state *Volkshochschul*-associations serve a coordinating function. Traditionally most courses offer no credits or certificates but are taken for their own sake. They take place once a week in the evening for two hours over several weeks. Since the early 1980s more day-courses and full-time classes have come to be offered. This is especially true for vocational training. These classes finish with certificates and serve as job preparation, thus meeting the growing demand for the training and retraining of adults in vocational fields, especially for unemployed people.

### Protestant and Catholic Churches

Adult education in West Germany is organized on a pluralistic basis. This means that non-government or "free" groups independently determine their specific educational concepts and develop their own programs. Protestant and Catholic churches play an important role within this pluralistic system.

Courses offered by the churches go beyond religious instruction. This stems historically from the situation after World War II in West Germany when, intentionally open to the needs of

a pluralistic society, the churches sought to promote a new sense of responsibility in and for the world. The educational work of the churches came to be understood as an opportunity for everyone willing to explore socially relevant issues and engage in an open dialogue.

As shown in Table 2, church-sponsored adult education covers about 5% of the participation rate in Germany. In 1997 a total of 8.3 million participants took part in 340,000 classes. While protestant churches offered 123,000 classes with 2,926,000 participants, the Catholic Church carried out 200,000 classes with 5,384,000 participants (*Bundesministerium*, 1998, 278). These courses were offered in the following main areas: parent and family education and school issues, philosophy and religion, literature and art, health, home economics, creativity and leisure time activities.

### The Forgotten Providers of Adult Education

Again the list cited in Table 2 reveals only a somewhat distorted and incomplete picture of adult education providers. Reference is made only to institutions that intentionally organize training and education. But in the list of providers of educational opportunities, many more institutions should be included: museums, libraries, hiking societies, music bands, gardening clubs, hobby-meetings, sport clubs, arts and crafts shops (that offer art, baking, or wall-painting courses, etc.), the Red Cross, dancing schools, driving schools, newspapers, television, radio, etc. It seems that more development is needed before we can accurately portray the whole of the learning opportunities for lifelong and lifewide education.

## Finances

Education is regarded in Germany as a civil right that should not depend on family income. The school, college, and university systems are state-operated and free of cost; private schools are the exception. This has consequences for adult and continuing education. As people pay no tuition for school and vocational education and in company-organized continuing education, the general expectation is that fees for participation in continuing education should also be low. The prices paid by the participants are mostly moderate. For example an English course at a Volkshochschule with ten 90 minute lessons cost about US-\$ 40. In company-organized continuing education costs are covered by the company and take place during the paid working hours. But in the recent past companies try to place at least parts of the training in the employees free time.

So in general there exists a wide offering of adult education with low financial barriers. Anyhow, the reduced public funding in the last years, resulting in higher prices for the participants, seemed to function selectively. This is contradictory to the idea of adult education, which has always understood education as a means to equalize inequalities, supporting especially those who did not have good starting chances.

Over the years one specific development has become visible: Until the 1970s money did not play a major role in adult education in Germany. Most course leaders and managers worked as volunteers because of their personal commitment for a more or less nominal fee or free of charge. The classes took place at night in public schools, church facilities or in a village inn, so also here no costs came up. Expensive technology was not necessary—a slide projector could be supplied privately, a 16-mm-film projector could

be borrowed from a school. That made many offerings free of charge. The process of professionalization—professional trainers and training facilities, but also the value of the investment in education and training for individuals and companies—changed this. Especially human resource development has become a market where money plays a major role. This produced a split market: While companies can afford expensive trainers the public institutions like Volkshochschule or church-related institutions can not pay these prices. Surprisingly there is no clear evidence that this leads to a clearly visible difference in quality. Because it is a problem to define "quality in adult education", there is especially in human resource development the danger that "showmen" with big promises and colorful brochures are hired.

## The Role of the State and Legal Regulations

It may be surprising that the state is not named in the list of providers of adult education in Germany. Although the school—and university system in Germany is government-operated, adult and continuing education is not organized by state authority.

Regarding the state influence in Germany three levels have to be discriminated: the federal government, the state governments of the sixteen federal states forming the Federal Republic of Germany, and the local and regional city-administrations.

According to the Federal Constitution of West Germany, education is under the authority and jurisdiction of the states. Most legal regulations concerning adult education were formulated between 1970 and 1980 and differ somewhat from state to state. Only a few specific fields are under the jurisdiction and financial support of the federal government, namely programs that promote employment (to a tremendous extent following the unification of the

two Germanies), and immigrant programs.

The legal regulations do not regulate adult education in detail, but serve more as a general framework. The aim is to guarantee reliable offerings responsive to citizens' needs. The offerings of adult education are not organized by the state itself, but by various institutions ("pluralistic structure"). To be eligible for state funding, providers of adult education must meet certain criteria, such as orientation to public goals, access to everyone, not-for-profit orientation, competent personnel, reliable permanent organization, and membership in a state organization.

The most direct public influence can be seen on the city level : As previously stated, two thirds of the Volkshochschulen are part of the city administration; the director and the full-time employees are part of the city-hired and paid staff. But even there the decisions about and the responsibility for the program contents and standards are with the director; the city government is not directly involved in these decision making processes.

This balanced system of individual and institution responsibility within a general legal framework surprisingly leads—in spite of the partial funding—to a high degree of independence from the influence of the funding politics and government (similarly from church authority).

These legal regulations also can serve as an indicator of the societal awareness of adult education in Germany. They show that adult and continuing education has become important enough for legal regulations to become necessary.

### Theoretical Mainstreams

The idea of democratization through adult education, important in the 1920s, 1950s, and 1970s, is marginal today.

Similarly, the emancipatory ideas from the 1970s are no longer championed. The impassioned arguments heard in the 1970s and early 1980s to make learning open for everybody have today also lost their vigor, perhaps because this seems today accepted and also as the participation rates show—to a certain degree realized. The concept of lifelong learning also seems widely accepted.

Self-directed learning, the central topic of American adult education during the past three decades has, in the last five years, become an attractive feature especially in company training. It seems that the idea to shift the responsibility for learning from the company to individual learners has a certain appeal for both companies and politicians.

On the scholarly level in Germany, interpretative and constructive theories today play an important role. Learners, their biographies, mental strategies, and activities are at the center of discussions concerning the learning process. *Teilnehmerorientierung* (participant orientation) is a concept that seems to be a fundament of adult education in Germany since two decades. The word "teaching" is out of fashion today. However, this focus on the learner reduces the diligence to develop didactical and methodical theories and arrangements. Also reduced is the discussion, which contents or intentions adult education should offer or address—besides those that are easily marketable. While in former years an important question was, what the learner needs, today more is asked, what learners want.

Overlooking the theoretical mainstreams it seems that in the last twenty years various theories have emerged. They have been discussed, have been the focus of some research, and then after a short time have been replaced by new concepts and theories. This is especially true for human resource development.

## The "Adult Educator"

There is a wide variety of types of adult educators : unpaid volunteers, persons that teach a few hours (mostly one course, 90 minutes a week) aside from their normal job, and others that try to teach as many courses as possible through which they have to earn at least a part of their living. In vocational continuing education there is also a group of free-lance workers that sell their courses on a commercial basis, mostly several days at a time for special training programs. And then there are full-time staff members, most often engaged in management and organization, with limited teaching responsibilities.

The typical staff situation in adult education institutions consists of a small number of full-time administrators who design, manage, and supervise programs that are then carried out by a large number of part-time "teachers". In 1997 the *Volkshochschulen* were staffed by less than 10,000 full-time personnel, but nearly 200,000 persons hired on an hourly-paid basis offered most of the more than 500,000 courses.

Formal qualifications of these "adult educators" range from none to a university diploma in adult education (see next section). While some adult educators come with teaching experience in various forms of schooling, others come with degrees or vocational training in their respective subject fields (e.g., engineering, economics, administration, etc.). Larger institutions offer special training ("Train-the-Trainer") to provide their staff members with some competency for working with adult learners. However, most course leaders do their work without any special educational training. Research shows that most people working in adult education see themselves as "subject-matter specialists". Not much priority is placed on andragogical competence.

Thus the staff situation in adult education in Germany shows the openness of the field. Academically trained adult educators work in the field along side with untrained and unpaid laypersons. No common standard yet exists of what constitutes an "adult educator".

## The Academic Level : Andragogy as the Science of the Education of Adults

During the 1920s, scholars in Germany began to reflect and write on the educational theory of adult education (e.g., Flitner, Rosenstock-Huessy, von Erdberg), but it took as long as 1970 for the first chair of adult education to be established at a university. At that time it also became possible to study adult education in a nine semester-long course of study including internships for a *Diplompädagogik mit Schwerpunkt Erwachsenenbildung*. This "Diploma in Pedagogy, with specialization in adult education," can today be studied in about one fourth of the German Universities. The emphasis in this 128-semester hour-course of study is on pedagogical fundamentals and adult education theories, didactics and methods. The students are prepared not only for teaching, but also for counseling, and program planning, and administration. Psychology and sociology and an elected subject are included in the curriculum. Some universities also offer masters programs, which are academically equivalent, but enable a wider combination with other subjects.

The blossoming of adult education as a field of study, together with emphasis on research, theory work, and other scholarly activities in the last 30 years has led to the development of an academic body of knowledge, university based institutionalization, and the emergence of a science that deals with the education of

adults. To distinguish between the field of practice ("adult education") and the science that relates to the education of adults, Reischmann (1996) has suggested the use of the term *Andragogik* for the scientific field. This is the term that was originally coined in Germany in 1833, first re-emerged in the 1920s and then again after 1950.

In the 1970s and 1980s a greater part of the students enrolled in adult education as a field of academic study were "second chance students", e.g., adult education practitioners in pursuit of a formal university degree. Today the majority of the students of andragogy are between 20 and 25 years old. Compared with international experiences, this pattern may seem unusual but it does signal the ongoing process of professionalization in this field.

Most scholars in andragogy have still direct connections to selected segments of the adult education providers and the practitioners working there. Giving lectures, exchanging experiences, writing for their journals supports the communication between research and practice—without solving the problem, that practitioners often assess the scholars as "too theoretical", and scholars regret that the high number of practitioners are mainly qualified by their "experience".

## Changes and Shifts

Looking back on the history of over a one hundred years, adult education in Germany reveals many changes and shifts. Of the four roots of the adult education idea—value based/ religious/ social, empowering/ emancipatory/ political, enriching/humanistic/ individual, and pragmatic—it seems that today the pragmatic approach is predominant. That does not mean that the other ideas are absent, but the discussions conducted by adult educators about

such topics as the nature of the field and about who owns the "real" adult education have lost sharpness and heat—at least for the moment. Until the mid-1980s it seemed impossible for adult educators coming from general adult education to "sell his soul to capitalism" in company training; similarly the conceptual discussion in general adult education and human resource development had no connection. Today that has totally changed. Human resource development has a high interest in general adult education, and the traditional providers of general adult education are offering vocational training.

As described, adult education in the near past experienced a process of intensification and diversification. Access has now become available nearly everywhere—of course not for all subjects, nor for all population groups. "Learning" is no longer considered primarily an activity for children. It seems that Germany is on the way to becoming a learning society.

Adult education in Germany has become more professionalized than ever before. More adult educators now view themselves as professionals and earn incomes commensurate with their status. There has been some discussion concerning the establishment of professional standards of quality. However, there has never been so many subject matter specialists, andragogical amateurs, working in this field. Certainly, the old type of adult educator, the engaged volunteer who was committed to the idea of enlightenment and education, working without being paid, can still be found. But for the majority, adult education has become a chance to earn extra income for some hours of teaching with little or no andragogical preparation for their work. The number of university trained specialists in andragogy is minimal compared to the whole field that even when they occupy key leadership positions they cannot influence the entire dynamic field. Overall, then, there is no clear

trend to determine whether the field is moving toward more or less professionalization.

The process of professionalization has intensified the market-orientation of adult education in Germany. The segments of the field that make no money—political, historic, or general enriching topics, programs that serve such target groups as the unemployed, mothers, or immigrants—are losing in this development. These segments have traditionally been subsidized by the state. Demonstrating the conflict between the idea of public responsibility and market expectation, commercial training institutions emphasize programs on topics and for target groups most likely to make money, and leave the less profitable topics and target groups for public providers such as the Volkshochschule or churches.

Another change in content and orientation can be observed as a widespread trend : general, person-enriching, and society-oriented contents are decreasing, while usable contents and fun-orientation are increasing. The method of lecturing to an audience is decreasing, while activity—and interaction-oriented methods are increasing.

A clear change is observable in the field of "Political education", which was an important task for the new democratic West Germany state following World War II. Both federal and the state governments, as well as the political parties, installed special institutions(e.g., *Bundes-/Landeszentrale fr politische Bildung*) and foundations that offered or supported programs, courses, and activities for political education. These programs offered not political propaganda, but education, i.e., about the constitution, the system of law, history, economic development, and "How democracy functions". This segment of adult education was strong until the 1970s, when the numbers of interested participants dwindled. It was concluded that interest in political education and engagement had disappeared. But also the opposite conclusion could

be drawn : Citizens are more engaged in political activities than before, but the form of engagement has changed. Instead of institution-sponsored courses, citizens are now engaging in political activities around such topics as the environment, traffic problems, and local culture; they are also participating in self-help groups that organize themselves. This shift in the patterns of participation suggests a more comprehensive definition of "political education".

It is difficult to weigh the contribution of adult education to German society in terms of social equity and democracy. The "old" political adult education found it self-evident that information about citizen topics led to more democracy, thus following the old enlightenment hope that the better informed person would be a better citizen. In more recent developments higher emphasis is placed on direct citizen activities. But it well might be that not so much the contents, but the mere fact that room is offered, were citizens can freely exchange even critical topics, helps more towards a democratic society than instructions and curricula.

### Some Open Fields

Presenting one's own country to foreign readers for comparison is always problematic due to the author's difficulty of recognizing and selecting information especially about the weaknesses of his system. For example :

The role of universities and colleges in adult education in Germany is relatively marginal. The structure of university education is aimed at young students who study in one block of nine to twelve semesters until graduation. There are no intermediate graduations to allow a break and later coming back. Although adults can return to study, this is still unusual. For working adults, there seem to be more convenient ways to

supplement or change their careers.

A disappointing experience in the 1960s was the development and offering of "large systems" that allowed pursuit of degrees through flexible combinations of learning modules at various institutions. However, the expectation of optimistic educators that adults were eagerly waiting for certificates and upgraded school qualifications were not fulfilled.

Distance learning in Germany has not become very popular. In a small and densely populated country, where many types of face-to-face learning are available to the majority of the population no more than a one-hour driving distance away, distance education has never been more than a second choice for most adults. Furthermore, distance learning offerings in the German language were not internationally marketable. Further, the regulations for examinations and degrees are so narrowly related to traditional forms of learning that distance learning had not much chances. Of course today "learning through Internet" is heralded as the totally new world of learning, but the promises are the same as they were in former years with other media such as the tape-recorder, 16 mm-film, video-cassettes, video-conferencing, tele-teaching, and CD-ROM : learning becomes available everywhere, and at any time, at lower costs, with higher quality, and with greater opportunities for individualization. None of these former media has significantly expanded learning opportunities in Germany, non has fulfilled the promises. It remains to be seen if the development of the Internet will accomplish what these other media did not.

Basic adult education programs that promote literacy are also marginal in Germany. Even in big cities very few classes have been organized. It seems that the German school system is reliable enough to secure these basic cultural techniques.

## Comparative Perspective

With its many traditions, roots, and facets, adult education in Germany is in a developmental stage marked by variety—various institutions, programs, aims and ideas, parallel developments and competition. Adult education providers show little cooperation and coordination among themselves. They are often unaware of other providers that comprise the full scope of the field. Some of the developments can only be understood in the context of German culture, history, and economy.

Two central arguments are given in comparative adult education to explain the value of trying to understand adult education practices in other countries (Reischmann, Bron, Jelenc, 1999). On a practical level, "borrowing" is expected to help us adapt successful foreign practices and integrate them into our own practical work—and avoid mistakes and "reinventing the wheel". On a theoretical level, the international—comparative perspective can help us to overcome ethnocentric blindness, helping us, irritated by observations in a foreign context, to better perceive and understand our own field and system.

Certainly cultural differences limit the transfer from one country to another. Comparative research, by helping to understand the differences and similarities as well as their significance for adult education, can clarify the possibilities and limits of understanding and borrowing. Both are indispensable in a world where in many countries experiences in the various fields of adult education are gained and needed.

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