Comparative studies - dialectics of differences and similarities on the example of the project “Cultural education of adults in Poland and Germany”

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“Cultural education of adults in Poland and Germany”

Metaconditioning of comparative studies

- historical and present relations between the countries,
- common political and social interests, as well as rules of acting in a community,
- contacts and cooperation between the partners up until present time,
- objective conditions of cooperation (culture, policies, legislation),
- research traditions in the partner countries,
- researchers’ interpretative schemes
- researchers’ styles and attitudes
- specialised language,
- sources of funding.

The specific nature of comparative adult education studies

- differences among countries concerning:
  - Aims and tasks of adult education,
  - legal and economic environment of adult education,
  - model of educational market,
  - tradition of adult education research
- adult education as a part of European transformation processes
Key skills of researchers:

- empathy and trust
- common interest in the subject
- openness for what is different / new
- willingness to compromise
- mutual acceptance, partnership
- a non-evaluative and non-judging, but critical approach

Initial conceptualisation of the research

- setting down common research interests to allow for a widely understood comparison
- reconciling problems significant for both partners
- taking into account historical, political and social conditions
- adopting flexible, open research approach
Further conceptualisation and implementation of the project

- accepting different theoretical approaches and knowledge about them,
- a common research strategy that takes into account the specificity of attitude towards research in a given country,
- the same questions do not have to lead to identical research procedures,
- finding the intersection, common points
- constant differentiation and specification of questions and methodology according to the situation,
- case studies as a method to reveal/look for differences.

When the project has been finished – durability and continuity

- developing of projects allowing to continue, repeat studies together or separately (e.g. the studies of S. Słowińska)
- New forms of findings distribution allowing for dissemination
- intentional returns to projects to re-use them for various purposes
Principles of cooperation in international research projects

- reconciling common research interests, questions and procedures in direct contact,
- taking into account historical, political and social conditions
- openness to differences, looking for common points,
- formulating wide-ranging research problems,
- looking for research procedures compatible with the conditions in each country, instead of standardising
- openness and flexibility towards theories and methodologies,
- assembling differentiated and multigenerational research teams.

Added value of comparative studies

- creating conditions for international cooperation,
- cultural familiarisation, breaking stereotypes,
- developing tolerance, openness, overcoming difficulties,
- reciprocal learning in the professional, social and cultural field,
- inspiration to individual research and further co-operative projects,
- learning/perfecting foreign languages, getting to know people and countries,
- building an international community.
Building an international community through research projects