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THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF STUDIES IN ADULT EDUCATION

The Example of COMPALL: Comparative Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning¹

ABSTRACT

This paper analyses international contexts of adult education and higher education as a framework for the COMPALL Joint Module. The module is designed to develop international knowledge, comparative research methods, intercultural competences, didactical insights, and networking experiences. The paper outlines the structure of the module and describes how such internationalisation impacts the participants. The evaluation shows that participants of the Joint Module develop not only intercultural competences, but also methodological, didactical, and networking competences. Furthermore, the module forges close partnerships between the respective universities as well as sustainable networks that extend beyond those of young students in adult education. The Joint Module gave several participants a fresh outlook on employability by integrating international perspectives into their prospective work contexts.

Keywords: adult education, internationalisation, comparative adult education, professionalization, higher education

INTERNACIONALIZACIJA ŠTUDIJA V IZOBRAŽEVANJU ODRASLIH – PRIMER PROJEKTA COMPALL: PRIMERJALNE ŠTUDIJE V IZOBRAŽEVANJU ODRASLIH IN VSEŽIVLJENJSKEM UČENJU – POVZETEK

Prispevek analizira mednarodni kontekst izobraževanja odraslih in visokošolskega izobraževanja kot ogrodja za pripravo skupnega modula COMPALL. Modul COMPALL je zasnovan za razvoj mednarodnega znanja, komparativnih raziskovalnih metod, interkulturnih kompetenc, didaktičnih strategij in izkušenj mreženja. Prispevek povzema strukturo modula in opisuje njegov vpliv na udeležence z vidika internacionalizacije. Evalvacija kaže, da udeleženci skupnega modula razvijejo ne le interkulturene kompetence, ampak tudi metodološke in didaktične kompetence ter kompetence mreženja. Skupni modul omogoča tudi razvoj tesnega partnerstva med posameznimi univerzami in vzpostavitev trajnostnih mrež, ki presegajo zgolj mlade študente v izobraževanju odraslih. Sodelovanje v skupnem modulu je več

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¹ Parts of this paper were first published in Egetenmeyer (2017).

udeležencem ponudilo nove zaposlitvene možnosti z vključevanjem mednarodnih perspektiv v njihove predvidene delovne kontekste.

Ključne besede: *izobraževanje odraslih, internacionalizacija, primerjalna andragogika, profesionalizacija, visokošolsko izobraževanje*

INTRODUCTION

Adult education as a field of practice, policy, and research can nowadays be increasingly understood as an international activity. This is different from the past, when adult education was more strongly embedded in national contexts. But at the beginning of the last century, strong international collaboration in adult education could also be observed between practitioners of various European countries (Németh, 2017a). Internationalisation and globalisation processes in adult education have to be understood in terms of their interrelations to globalisation processes in societies and international policies. But they can also be understood against the background of internationalisation in the field of adult education practice, which Knoll (1996) says is more international than adult education research.

Beside adult education, there are strong internationalisation processes in higher education, which also has a long history of international collaboration. Travelling to other universities, having intellectual exchanges with other academics, and communicating in a common academic language has been a regular feature of academic life since the beginning of modern times. Hilde De Ridder-Symoens (1992) calls this the ‘pilgrimage’ of academics. More recently, Varghese (2017) sees cross-border education as a typical phenomenon of internationalisation in the context of economic globalisation, and outlines various types of cross-border education developed in recent years.

Adult education as an academic subject and study is related to internationalisation processes not only in adult education itself but also in higher education in general. This provides the background for the Joint Module in “Comparative Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning” (COMPALL), which has been developed as part of the ERASMUS+ Strategic Partnership COMPALL (2015-2018)². It focuses on the development of adult education students’ personal resources and capacities for internationalisation. This embeddedness in internationalisation in higher education and in adult education is reflected in a recently published volume (Egetenmeyer, Guimarães and Németh, 2017).

A partner consortium of seven European universities (Aarhus/Denmark, Florence/Italy, Helmut-Schmidt-University in Hamburg/Germany, Lisbon/Portugal, Padua/Italy, Pécs/Hungary, Würzburg/Germany) took the initiative to develop a joint-module methodology designed to allow universities to provide an international study programme for their master’s and doctoral students in adult education, based on their specific needs. The

² <https://www.hw.uni-wuerzburg.de/compall/startseite/>

consortium was created by universities and adult education professors who strongly appreciate the value of a joint module from an institutional perspective as well. This allowed for the deep institutional integration of the COMPALL Joint Module into the curricula of master's and doctoral studies.

This paper addresses internationalisation processes in adult and continuing education, and in higher education. It asks the question: How can international processes be represented in university studies in adult education? To answer this question, the paper identifies the international educational objectives for adult education studies developed in the COMPALL Joint Module. It then outlines the module's didactical and organisational structure for developing the identified educational objectives. Finally, the paper discusses how the module affects the participants' perspectives on internationalisation.

THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

This paper understands current political and societal developments as a background for adult and continuing education research and practice, which makes single phenomena in these two fields of education only understandable as parts of international contexts. Internationalisation in education, adult education, and continuing education – and hence comparisons with other countries – originally provided an impetus for “learning from the other” (Reischmann, 2008). A classic example in the German context is using the perspective of the English University Extension initiative to consider introducing this activity at German universities as well. This differentiation between self and the other (country/context/case) no longer appears in this clear-cut fashion. Moreover, international phenomena are now interwoven into “national” situations, cases, and contexts of adult education. Cultural theory discusses concepts such as transculturality (Welsch, 2010) or hybrid subjects (Reckwitz, 2006). These support the deconstruction of the dualism between national and international perspectives, emphasising the interwoven perspective of how different contexts influence a phenomenon. For adult and continuing education, three arguments can be found for this interwoven situation, and are presented below. These arguments represent the background into which the employment opportunities of graduates in adult education are integrated.

International and European education policies

Educational issues have traditionally been a national issue and in some countries even a regional one. The 1992 Maastricht treaties (European Communities, 1992), which regulated collaboration in the European Union, even feature a harmonisation ban for educational issues. However, education is understood by international organisations such as the European Union, OECD, and UNESCO as a very important instrument for developing societies. This is why international organisations act in so-called “soft-laws” (Marcussen, 2004; Bieber and Martens, 2011) in educational issues. They convince member countries to agree on the formulation of policies (joint targets) in educational issues. However, it

should be stressed that international organisations are not hierarchically above national governments. In fact, nationally elected governments are members of international organisations. And most educational policies formulated by organisations can only be realised with the consent of all member countries. This is why viewing national governments and international organisations as opposed to each other involves the danger of ignoring that educational policies represent an agreement of national governments (Klatt, 2014). Realising and implementing the targets of international policies is the responsibility of the member countries. European policies on adult and continuing education can be found in several EU documents that target lifelong learning and education in general (European Union, 2012) or adult education as a specific area of learning and education (European Union, 2011). However, they can also be found in policies, programmes, and benchmarking studies of UNESCO and OECD (e.g. GRALE-Report, PIAAC study). These activities created a certain transparency in the education of member countries. Furthermore, international policies govern national ones. Local developments on qualification frameworks, the recognition of prior and informal learning, credit systems, literacy activities or quality management systems are only a few examples of what is realized at the local but agreed on at the international level. This is why local activities are interrelated with international developments and only understandable in their international interdependence.

The internationalisation of societies

Local communities and societies as a whole are going through an enormous internationalisation process. On the one hand, this has been brought on by the digitalisation of people's daily lives. Neither communication, social relationships, online reading and research, nor markets or sales are local or national in nature. Moreover, they are localized through online access and available digital resources. This should not eliminate the borders of duty-free markets, which do not benefit people from all countries. Rather, this argument should focus on other kinds of boundaries and non-boundaries. Furthermore, the free movement of people between several countries allows for the easier mobility of their citizens. Free movement in the European Union also increases the number of people who relocate for employment reasons (OECD, 2015). International refugee situations, too, increase the migration of people to other places within and beyond national borders. For adult and continuing education, this means that the population becomes more international. It also means that non-mobile people have more possibilities to interact with people with a migration background. Thereby, the target group for adult and continuing education is becoming more diverse. As adult and continuing education has to adapt significantly to meet the needs and backgrounds of its target group, considering internationalisation is a fundamental basis for successful work in this field.

The international market for continuing education

The development of international trade agreements and duty-free markets also enables and supports the provision of services such as continuing education. As part of the iMove project, the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research has initiated a platform

to support German providers of continuing education in offering (and selling) their services outside Germany as well. Frequently, there are target providers who sell technical products and who, along with these products, also provide continuing education to help customers use and repair them. The iMove project illustrates the increase of initial vocational and continuing education “exported” from Germany to other countries. The trend reports name China and India as having the highest demand for German educational exports (BIBB, 2016). Developing continuing educational opportunities for an “international market” may become a career field for graduates in adult and continuing education.

THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN EUROPE

Concurrent with these internationalisation developments in adult education, there has also been international development in higher education, where adult education is established as a specific field of study. As a result, the adult education field of study is included in the international developments at universities that affect all academic subjects.

In Europe, the ERASMUS programme has been providing mobility opportunities for university students for 30 years, and for teachers and staff of European higher education institutions for several years (DAAD, 2017). With the mobility budget being raised every year, European mobility is becoming an instrument of support to many students. Student mobility has created a so-called “ERASMUS generation” of mobile university graduates with international experience. Beside the mobility programmes for staff and teachers, the development programmes also support the institutional development of educational activities. In all these activities, joint development has become respected as well as widespread in European universities. Today, joint international activities are less unique and have become more acknowledged and requested than a decade ago.

The international education policies outlined above have brought about the intensive development of European higher education institutions. Bologna-compliant study programmes were developed in the last fifteen years. In general terms, a three-cycle degree structure (bachelor, master, and doctorate) is now in place throughout Europe (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2015). Modular structures, credit points, the recognition of internationally acquired credits, and learning agreements are just some examples of this process. Beside the legitimate criticism of its structure and reforms, the Bologna Process has developed a system that makes mobility, joint activities, and the mutual formal recognition of credits possible as an integrated part of university studies. The development of a joint module can build on these structures, which ensures the formal and legal basis for the joint activity.

In this context, universities may have explicit and/or implicit internationalisation strategies to support international activities. These strategies can include increasing international student enrolment, facilitating the recognition of internationally acquired credits, supporting international summer or winter schools, increasing the number of courses held in English, or providing additional funding for long-/short-term mobility. Support

may not mainly be financial. However, a university's commitment makes administrative and committee work easier, especially in terms of the administrative and legal structures of international work. When it comes to the development of international programmes, a university's digital, technical, and media services may substantially bolster the development of digital and online support for international collaboration activities in teaching and research.

THE EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES OF THE COMPALL JOINT MODULE

The COMPALL Joint Module is being developed in response to the growing need for international insights among graduates in adult and continuing education on the one hand, and the growing commitment of universities to international teaching activities on the other. It understands international insights as a need for international experiences that can neither be limited to academic subjects nor to select competences. Rather, holistic and – as far as possible – broad-based experience in thinking, acting, and reflecting within an international learning environment is necessary to receive these insights. The goal is to cultivate

a process of understanding international and intercultural phenomena. Comparisons in international groups provide new insights into other countries and into new aspects and variations of new models. They also facilitate a better and more detailed understanding of the situation in one's own home country. Furthermore, they give participants a sense of how difficult it is to compare situations in other countries [...] [,] to understand in a cognitive, emotional, and social way the limitations of our understanding of our own and other phenomena. Ideally, this insight leads to an attitude of further questioning one's own understanding in an ongoing endeavour to working on deeper understanding. An ideal 'result' of the Winter School is to never have a final result, but to continue the never ending journey of personal efforts to try to understand each other. This also means searching for the things that link us to each other: to be aware of the always existing boundaries of our own understanding while developing an attitude of 'constantly trying' (Egetenmeyer, 2016, p. 19).

Against this background, the following educational objectives should be understood as interdependent rather than isolated.

The academic objective of the COMPALL Joint Module is to analyse European policies in lifelong learning that refer to adult education and the relevant policies of other international organisations. The analysis includes insight into the diversity of the forms in which international policies may appear and be implemented. It should make participants aware of the fact that European educational policies must be adapted to diverse local situations, and that diverse forms appear within and beyond the European Union. The second academic objective is to provide participants with in-depth insights into one current research issue in adult and continuing education and its international forms of

appearance. These issues change each year according to the current research questions of international experts teaching in the Joint Module. This approach allows participants to study and research current trends and to gain insight into cutting-edge research questions in adult and continuing education.

The research methodology objective is to cultivate participants' skills for analysing relationships between theories, policies/politics, and empirical practice in adult and continuing education. As there seem to be wide gaps between these fields, participants learn how to use a theoretical model to analyse policies/politics as well as empirical practice. In this way, they practice making analytical use of educational theories in general. Participants will be equipped with analytical skills to analyse practical contexts of their future employment contexts, too. Furthermore, participants apply comparative research skills in adult education in a research-based learning context. In this way, they are introduced to the comparative-interpretative research method of the Joint Module and trained in its use. Doctoral students are introduced to writing a joint comparative research paper. Furthermore, they are guided in the writing and the quality assurance processes (e.g. adaption to peer review, proofreading, publication).

Beside the academic and methodological objectives, the development of *intercultural competences* plays a crucial role in the COMPALL Joint Module. One aspect of this objective is to develop the ability to use English as the language of international communication in adult education. This includes knowing specialised and professional English terminology, but it also means being willing and prepared to interact with colleagues in English – colleagues for whom English is not a native language either. Interacting in English means disclosing one's own limitations in communicating in a foreign language. Nevertheless, it also cultivates an interest in each other and helps getting to know oneself and other colleagues in a new, mutually respectful way. The aforementioned cultivation of an "attitude of further questioning one's own understanding in an ongoing endeavour to working on deeper understanding" (ibid.) also requires the cultivation of distance to each other – respect for the "normality of the other" (Hunfeld, 2014, translation by the author). The cultivation of distance allows for asking in an ongoing way what can be understood from the other and one's own self, and where further efforts at mutual understanding are necessary. Distance supports respect for the other, willingness to learn from each other, and a working climate of awareness about the existing differences. This is essential for intercultural competence and shows why the cultivation of asking and re-asking is necessary for international work.

A further educational objective is the implicit development of *didactical insights* into the development of educational settings for adults. The COMPALL Joint Module is developed through intensive didactical reflections among the partner universities and serves as a kind of didactical model for education with adults. Participants gain insights into on-line learning settings, interactive learning settings, theory-practice learning settings, and programme design learning settings. The goal is to respect the diversity of the learning settings of the partner universities and participants.

Networking experiences are a further educational objective of the Joint Module, and stress the need for the development of international networks and partnerships. Participants are systematically brought into contact with each other during the whole module. In this way, a basis for the further internationalisation of research and practice in adult education is developed. Doctoral students have the opportunity to write a paper with international joint authorship, which is still a rare phenomenon in adult education (Fejes and Nylander, 2014; Käßplinger, 2015).

ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE COMPALL JOINT MODULE

Partnership and target group

The COMPALL Joint Module is being developed as a partnership between seven universities from five European countries, each with different emphases and expertise in the academic field of adult and continuing education. The joint module approach allows universities to also provide their students with academic opportunities based on the expertise of the partner universities. This is especially valuable for those partner universities that have only very limited teaching capacity in adult and continuing education. Furthermore, all partner universities can build on a context that appreciates the collaborative international development and provision of studies in adult and continuing education. Partner universities have integrated the joint module in different ways into their master's and doctoral programmes related to adult and continuing education (cf. Guimarães, Concetta and Fridson, 2017).

The COMPALL Joint Module is targeted at master's and doctoral students pursuing an academic emphasis in adult and continuing education. It consists of three parts: a preparatory phase, the Winter School in Würzburg, and a follow-up phase. As students not only have diverse backgrounds in terms of their undergraduate fields of study, but also in terms of their academic and research experiences (cf. *ibid.*), COMPALL provides tremendous opportunities but also requires rigorous preparation. This part of the module ensures that participants of the Winter School have a prior knowledge base that allows them to take full advantage of the in-depth study and international experience during their two weeks on-campus in Würzburg.

The preparation phase

For the preparation phase, the Strategic Partnership COMPALL has developed several online tutorials, which on the one hand introduce participants to the structure of the Joint Module, and on the other guide them in a didactical way through the preparatory material, which consists of preparatory readings. To that end, a Moodle course has been developed, allowing participants to interact with lecturers and with each other. Furthermore, a participant booklet outlining the structure has been designed. In addition, all online tutorials are available as open educational resources via the project's website³.

3 <https://www.hw.uni-wuerzburg.de/compall/startseite/>

The second part of the participants' preparation work is developing a transnational essay relating to one of the comparative groups in which participants practice comparative research during the Würzburg Winter School. Each comparative group is guided by an international expert in the respective topic. Experienced doctoral students act as co-moderators supporting the international experts in working with the participants. Each participant is assigned to one comparative group, which consists of about two students from each country. If possible, comparative groups represent between three and five different countries. During the preparation part, the Moodle course is used for communication between comparative group participants and moderators to agree on the topic of the transnational essay and its structure. The Strategic Partnership COMPALL provides participants with a guide for preparing the transnational essay. On top of that, partner universities offer on-campus meetings or seminars with students to prepare for the Winter School together.

This preparation phase takes place from November until January each year. The concurrent online and on-campus preparation as well as the guides allow for the preparatory phase to be adapted to the specific needs of the participants. It also allows for a differentiation between participants who have studied adult education in a broad way and newcomers to adult education, between master's and doctoral students, and between internationally experienced and unexperienced participants. Coordinators at the local partner universities make decisions according to the needs of their participants. Although such a level of heterogeneity among students has nowadays become uncommon in academic contexts, the experiences of the COMPALL Joint Module have been very positive. Differences in knowledge levels can be addressed mainly during the preparatory phase.

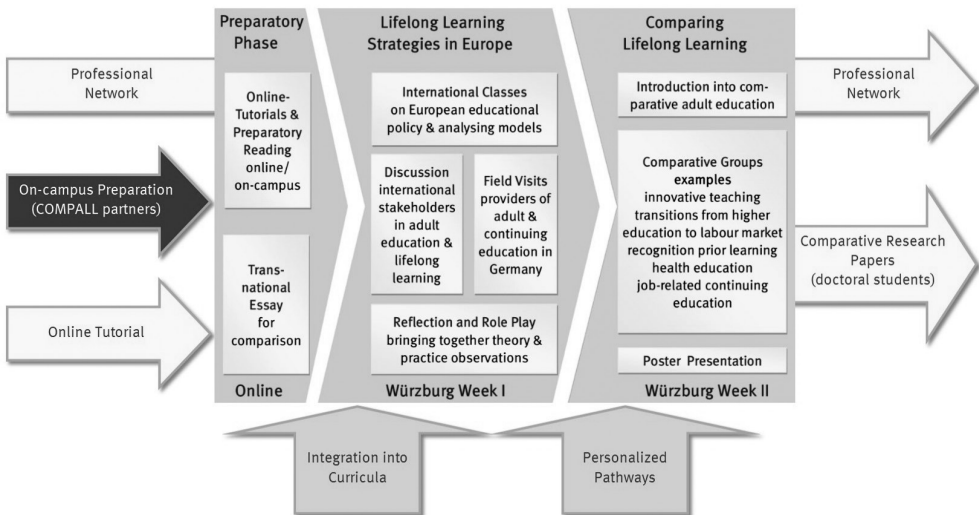


Figure 1: Structure of the COMPALL Project (Source: COMPALL project)

Heterogeneity also provides a diverse reflection basis for intercultural communication, and it is used systematically for creating additional learning settings among participants. In a didactical way, it represents the diversity of participants typically encountered in adult and continuing education.

To enable participants of the Joint Module to communicate with each other, they are invited to join an open and a closed LinkedIn network⁴. The participant profiles on LinkedIn also serve as a long-term networking tool between participants. Furthermore, the COM-PALL information tool provides participants with additional preparatory material in the field of comparative adult education.

Two weeks in Würzburg

During the first week in Würzburg, participants study a theoretical model that can be used for analysing educational policies. They explore European adult education policies and the structure of adult and continuing education providers in Germany. After being introduced to the model, students practice applying it to international policies and using it during their discussions with adult education stakeholders and during their field visits to adult and continuing education providers. For that purpose, participants collaborate in international groups, giving one another insights into each other's contexts. In this way, the participants serve as information resources for their own countries of origin. To strengthen the exchange between participants from different universities and countries, they are placed in seminar rooms next to participants from other universities. This approach reinforces their international experience because it stimulates communication in informal settings as well. By the end of the week, participants reflect on their observations and, against the background of the theoretical model, develop an understanding of the interdependencies between theories, policies, and practice.

During the second week in Würzburg, the comparative groups are introduced to comparative research in adult and continuing education. Each participant acts as a representative of his/her country of origin, and the groups work to identify comparative categories that work in their case. Comparative groups look at the different cases (e.g. countries or other contexts) in juxtaposition and try to come up with an interpretation by contextualizing the differences between the compared cases. The second week ends with an open-space presentation, in which each group presents their comparison to the others.

The follow-up phase

Doctoral students are offered the exclusive opportunity to co-author a comparative paper together with other doctoral students in their comparative group and possibly also with the group moderator. To that end, the authors select a few categories and cases for their comparison. The doctoral students receive guidance from the moderators on the structure and writing process of their paper. These are then subject to peer review, and successful

⁴ https://www.hw.uni-wuerzburg.de/compall/information_tool/

papers are published in joint volumes by international publishers (Egetenmeyer, 2016a; Egetenmeyer, Schmidt-Lauff and Boffo, 2017; Egetenmeyer and Fedeli, forthcoming).

THE INTERNATIONAL IMPACT FOR THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE JOINT MODULE

The COMPALL Joint Module is followed by an external evaluation, which is done each year after the winter school as well as twice as a mid-term evaluation 14-15 months after the respective winter school in April/May 2017 and 2018. The external evaluation is carried out on behalf of the COMPALL consortium by Susanne Lattke, at the German Institute for Adult Education. It shows the strong international impact that the participants experience through their participation. Although international interest can be expected from students who enrol in the Joint Module, the high number of students (around 90 participants each year) can also be seen as an indicator that interest is not only found among a small elite group of students.

Participating in the COMPALL Joint Module means studying in English, the international *lingua franca*. Studying in a shared language creates an international network and a community of experts in adult education. According to the mid-term evaluation, participants of the Joint Module value this experience. It promotes international openness and awareness of the fact that there is knowledge that is not directly accessible via the students' own mother tongue or via an international common language of instruction.

The feedback given in the short-term evaluation (Lattke and Egetenmeyer, 2017) shows that students think the winter school improves their intercultural competences and English language skills, which are highly valued by mobile students (Alves and Guimarães, 2017). Students also experience subject-related improvement concerning their analytical and methodological skills. The Joint Module seems to have the strongest impact on the participants' understanding of adult education in other countries and in their own.

The short-term evaluation also shows that doctoral students value the possibility to co-author an international paper most strongly. The idea to give doctoral students the opportunity to publish a comparative paper as a follow-up to the winter school was initially considered an experiment because funding was available. However, the possibility to receive close international guidance in writing a paper and to transfer the on-campus reflections into a written paper is becoming a central element of the winter school. Consequently, there are currently intensive discussions in the partner consortium on criteria for these comparative papers and their value for the academic discourse.

Although the mid-term evaluation received only a limited number of answers (75 answers), it shows former participants' have strong international outlook for both their studies and their careers. More than two-thirds of respondents anticipate either integrating an international perspective into their master's or doctoral thesis or working in an international environment.

The experiences of the partner consortium and the results of the evaluations emphasise the view that international dimensions should become a central part of university studies in adult education and lifelong learning. Adult education practice and research may nowadays no longer be understandable without their international interrelations. With the end of the COMPALL project in view in summer 2018, the partner consortium is currently considering further steps for the sustainable integration of these activities into the partners' regular curricula.

CONCLUSION

The COMPALL Joint Module is designed on the basis of current international developments in higher education as well as in adult education. It is incorporating these developments into a collaboration that allows for the strengthening of adult education studies at all partner universities. The Joint Module has created a teaching design which targets the development of differentiated competences that are necessary in the context of the outlined internationalisation processes.

The partnership allows an elaborative teaching design, which is developed and realized based on the expertise and engagement of all partners. The collaboration not only allows students insight into the different research perspectives and expertise of the partner consortium, but can further be understood as a way to access the international and comparative perspective in adult and continuing education. The evaluation results show the highly international perspectives of the module's former participants. This international orientation should not only be understood as valuable preparation for future generation's prospective work contexts, it can also be understood as an important foundation for the future international collaboration of practitioners and researchers in the field of adult education and lifelong learning.

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