ADULT EDUCATION AND COMPETENCIES
– APPROACHES OF RESEARCHERS IN GERMANY

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THE MACRO-DIDACTIC LEVEL OF PLANNING AND TAKING DECISIONS IN CONTINUING EDUCATION:
NEGOTIATING BETWEEN RESEARCH-BASED REQUIREMENTS FOR ADULT EDUCATION,
INDIVIDUAL NEEDS AND DEMANDS, MARKET CHALLENGES AND MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS

Key words: adult/continuing education, intermedial adult education, concept for planning through the flexible use of knowledge islands, planning process as alignment process, program exploration, needs assessment, inductive planning model

Abstract: Planning adult education in Europe should be varied and flexible, sensitive to market-driven institutional and organisational conditions, so that it reacts adequately to the needs arising from social, economic and scientific contexts. Flexible planning also aims at incorporating individual needs and interests that stem from the spirit of our times. On many occasions these current needs direct our attention towards phenomena which have not been academically or theoretically recognized although they play a significant role in everyday life.

In adult education, planning is an everyday activity performed by educational organisations and institutions for their clients, taking care of developing their competences and qualifications. Planning may also take place “among” different establishments and react to the needs of a region. In both cases planning is alignment with the requirements created by environment, demand, as well as with modernisation challenges and academic study results.

Planning requires constant observation of various processes in order to utilize this knowledge to create new programs, often in contradicting conditions. Knowledge islands from inductive planning model prove very helpful here, as they
can be used with a specific focus. They offer support in institutions and environment analysis, so as to reveal new possibilities for planning. In this way only are educational institutions able to fulfill their function as a social seismograph.

**Life-long learning and confusing organizational structures**

The title itself indicates that continuing education has to serve many masters; the demands and requirements placed on it must always be economically and politically justified. From a design perspective, the individual continuing to learn and be educated throughout the course of his or her life is considered a social norm, but one which must, as a rule, be financed and organized on one’s own. The exception is when the continuing education of the individual adds value for others, i.e. is in a company’s best interest.

On the bright side, we can say that more people than ever have been pursuing further education in recent decades. However, the levels of continuing education are still not high enough because, although everyone in Europe is expected to work longer, the “vintage factors” (Mertens 1974) are not sufficiently taken into account, i.e. those new qualification requirements that arise over the successive decades of a working life (Schmidt 2009). Also not taken into consideration is the formation of a stable personality, which can in the broadest sense be achieved through health education and cultural education and which is essential to a person’s working life.

The entire continuing education enterprise is fluid, arbitrary, selective and project-related with minimal, if any, management, only partly supported by state funding, and mostly financed by individuals, foundations and companies. In the case of projects, the special developments are controlled on a subject- or task-specific basis. In complete contrast to academic education (schooling), continuing education is thus without structure, orientated towards flexible requirements, and dependent on the demand by third parties and no longer primarily by that of individuals. As a result, there has been a rhizome-like growth of a market for continuing education. The current state of continuing education raises further questions about which entities are or should be setting professional standards or formulating quality features and who is responsible for these programs.

In addition to these structural conditions, the requirements in the course of a person’s life are becoming more diversified. They cover all cognitive, emotional and pragmatic levels, are much more short-term in character, have to be “just in time”, and are always associated with a certain field of action in a particular phase of life, while simultaneously aiming at certificates. Certifications and courses of studies for continuing education are gaining in importance. Furthermore, the opportunities for participation of those actually participating require a greater awareness of time constraints.
The school system with its highly structured phases and full-time structures focusing on grades, tests, and degrees meant to lay certain foundations for life in the respective culture differs significantly from the market-driven developments in continuing education. The latter help improve to varying degrees the knowledge, actions and reflection of adult individuals with their respective specific experiences and biographies subsequent to current situations. Degrees in specific subjects or profession-related clusters of action and competency are acquired through certified participation.

These requirements have led to a range of programs being offered with different profiles, in accordance with which task-related organizational structures for life-long learning have emerged that mould the programs with their topics, competency profiles, differing levels of knowledge, stimuli for reflection, and available models of action. As a result, we are witnessing a rhizome-like growth of socialized forms of learning at different locations, in different contexts, and with the increasing use of new learning technology, without the question of continuity being raised at all.

Scientific detachment is necessary to conduct didactic research or enhanced research on programs in adult/continuing education (see Gieseke et al. 2003, 2005, 2006; Gieseke, Opelt 2003; Heuer, Robak 2000, von Hippel 2011; Käpplinger 2007, 2008; Körber et al. 1995; Rieger-Goertz 2008), regardless of whether the adult/continuing education organizations or institutions to be examined have an intermediary or adjunctive status, operate as associations, limited companies or communal institutions, or are considered part of university education, through legal provision on the Federal State level or as continued scientific training, with the universities providing support for the active professional based on the insight they thus gain into these developments. Merely inquiring into the involvement of participants would mean to neglect a decisive part, namely the question of who is participating in what and why (see Fleige, Reichart 2013; Käpplinger 2013).

There is no corresponding freedom of choice in the school system – there wouldn’t be any point in that; thus these questions do not arise in school research. In contrast, research in the field of life-long learning after the beginning of professional activity, i.e. after school and training, faces the Herculean task of (program) planning activities, of dealing with issues of the specific structure formation and networking of organizations/institutions with their specific management challenges (see Schrader 2011, Hartz, Schrader 2008) and requirements of coordination and interlinking.

**Planning at the meso level**

In the following, I would like to address planning activities at the meso level, i.e. pedagogical action within an organization. We need to examine how topics can be made accessible and explored through knowledge and competence
requirements, what the usual practice is, and how the results gained, which constitute an organization’s program, can be professionally and efficiently analysed in order to be able to take further decisions concerning program planning. It has already been pointed out that antinomies, paradoxes, ambivalences and contradictions form a differentiated network in this (see von Hippel 2011, von Hippel/Schmidt-Lauff 2012). In the future, we will furthermore have to deal with issues of an ethics of pedagogical action in adult/continuing education and of decision support in the form of educational counselling for (potential) participants trying to make a choice on the confusing continuing-education market.

Communicative action as alignment

In the late 1990s (published in 2000, see also Gieseke 2003, 2008), we used a case-based program analysis to show the crucial role played by competent individual adult-educational acting in educational organizations if it takes the form of an initiative for educational requirements of the local population during the life course within the network of different interests, economic forces and issues of financing. For program planners to be able to meet these challenges, they require knowledge, especially empirical knowledge, of how such programs are planned.

The theoretical benchmark for that study was provided by theories of action, focusing on the concept of action formulated by Joas (1992), who identified as elements of action in the planning process not only the subjective will and the pre-defined objective, but also the different ways of coping with these situations on the basis of perception, knowledge and communication, sensitivity, receptivity and serenity. In the previous project, we focused on an empirical exploration of this theoretically grounded action and the reasons given to justify individual action on the basis of field observation and interviews being held on each workday, which were then inductively compared with an interview on the conceptual work. We were able to present results on program planning activities that were considered a concise description by the organization’s/institution’s staff and which were confirmed by more sociologically oriented studies using the regional context as theoretical starting point and correlating participation and program development (see Wittphoth 2007).

Content-wise, actions related to program planning include program planning itself, program implementation, facility management, evaluation, self-management and association work. Action strategies are the link between content, communication and intention. Action chains show which actions are interrelated and how. Planners are then less busy in working along a specific conceptual sequence; rather, they moderate, structure, find evidence, make connections, i.e. they are communicatively active.
This is why both Tietgens (1992) and Schemme (2005) speak of communicative action as a crucial form of action. This is technically correct, but overemphasises the organizational, management-related aspect, while overlooking the important content-related aspect of such action. It is the generation of knowledge and its pedagogical interpretation, relevant to different target groups, under varying regional conditions, which is being implemented. This is one result of our research (Gieseke 2000); it has been described as “alignment action and successive action” (Gieseke 2008, p. 48).

On a surface level not focusing on educational science, we can here speak of communicative action which evolves into program development, because being open to one’s surroundings is a key characteristic of institutions and organizations of adult/continuing education on the market today, even if they are not directed at potential participants, but rather at clients who delegate those participating (see early form in Tietgens 1992 and for the corporate sector Schemme 2005). It is not without reason that this type of adult/continuing education organizations/institutions has been described by resorting to neo-institutional theoretical references and concepts of governance with a claim to networking (see Schrader 2014, 2011; Tippelt 2005, 2009; Koch, Schemmann 2009). The planner takes on the role of seismograph, recording tremors in the environment and over time. The topics for adult/continuing education are more or less out in the open, but they must be identified with care, then taken up intentionally and actively and legitimised against a critical theory of adult education grounded, for example, on a philosophy of justice (see e.g. Nussbaum 1999). There is a need here for a new theoretical basis; in this context, the works of, for example, Han (2013) and Grünewald (2013) ought to be evaluated from an educational-theoretical perspective. Because conditions are becoming more and more akin to those prevalent in the English-speaking world and the market (i.e., large interest groups, sponsors, and foundations) is playing a stronger role, issues of power and conflicts of interest naturally come into play (see Cervero, Wilson 2006). In addition, cross-cultural specifics in global corporations require ever more complex combinations of technical, business, intercultural and cross-cultural skills and knowledge (for more detail see Robak 2012). It is impossible to avoid reference to the specific profession by offering generic continuing education programs.

“In the course of this alignment, program planning becomes a project jointly developed with others on the basis of adoption and coordination, of finding common solutions, exchanging ideas and taking joint decisions. Alignment is thus a process of optimization, of learning and acquiring knowledge, balanced by commitments. This process requires autonomy and a safe handling of individual theoretical concepts of adult/continuing education.” (Gieseke 2003, p. 206) Alignment action is a part of networking action and can be considered an element of a pedagogical synthesis, as a field of action of “a tiered, networked process of coordination and alignment involving
all persons communicating with one another from a wide range of institutions, associations, initiatives, from the fields of science, manufacturing and service, as well as from the social institutions active in the field of adult education or in the region. The planner is the person who moderates, negotiates, observes and evaluates, who structures the necessary planning steps and who ultimately decides, while deliberately being open to external resolutions and opinions. Thus, through the planning action they take, institutions of adult education act as a seismograph for educational needs as long as they are in demand as an open system with short-term offerings, i.e., as long as they are marketable in the sense that they meet the demands of participants” (Gieseke, Gorecki 2000, p. 94; Gieseke 2008, pp. 48–49).

“The key to the quality of the program is thus not communication, but rather the means of correlating the relevant factors in a balancing manner. What is important is hence the guiding strategy of action upon which the pattern of alignment activities is obviously based in practice. It is the link between contents, institutional interest in education/skills/qualifications within a specific region, the needs and requirements that have been identified and professional competence. Communication and the resulting network are thus the ties that lead to adequate educational programs or planned projects.” (Gieseke 2008, p. 49)

“Alignment is thus not conceived of as adjustment, nor is it obviously seen as such in the current practice; rather, it refers to an alignment of positions through negotiation, to coordination and, in that sense, also to optimization and it requires professionalism within the educational organizations.” (Gieseke 2008, p. 50)

A concept for macro/meso-didactic planning through the networking of knowledge islands

On this level, too, planning fulfills a seismographic function based on the ability to observe, make connections, take time, process interdisciplinary knowledge and investigate organizational contexts without believing that pedagogical issues could be inferred from other disciplines, but instead making these themselves the object of research (such as the planning function being investigated here).

Planning does not operate according to if-then correlations because it has to meet the complexity of the requirements under time pressure, while taking into consideration fast changing demands and needs for new competences, for more knowledge, not to be acquired in schematic manner, current challenges to be creative, and a great variety of topics. And always there is the question of how a wide cross-section of the population can be supported by providing diverse accesses to education. In this context, the economic social agendas of the zeitgeist of efficiency, effectiveness and optimization as well as flexibility constitute the current rules of the game, leading to work intensification and
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rationalization. A planning process generating knowledge and competences, however, only remains flexible if it looks at changes under different categories, sees their effects upon one another as reciprocal interdependency and accommodates each perspective individually.

If demands and needs are dealt with under the aspect of regionalization (area, location), freedom and security under the aspect of individualization as well as issues of interests, and if a discourse on justice from both a civil society and a state perspective comes into play, then the decisive question, from the point of view of adult education, is how individuals behave under the claim to life-long learning. From that perspective, planning cannot function as derivative action. Furthermore, knowledge has to be more differentiated and extensive because the ability to substantiate and to inform is on the increase, not on the decrease, in a society that is constantly documenting its actions. Given the limited human resources available to the adult/continuing education sector, it is basically not feasible to run through all knowledge islands justifiably belonging to a planning process merely to serve a superficial conceptual apparatus. Simultaneously, however, the demands are rising for more thorough and more accurate information on the effectiveness of pedagogical processes. This does not only refer to evaluation, but also describes a new range of theoretical and empirical educational research which looks at different perspectives as being interdependent. It also implies the demand to constantly monitor and analyse the profile of an organization in interaction with its environment during its process of planning and implementation in order to remain flexible in making decisions regarding trials, new requests, probable demands, new funding priorities, changes, conversions, and expansions. At the same time, it is assumed that the lecturers themselves are responsible for designing and planning the courses or seminars and that, among other things, an exchange on the culture of learning in adult/continuing education takes place through advanced training. (Fleige 2011)

Both the meso- and the macro-level deal with the bundling of the various individual offerings under program priorities, which have to be differentiated. Here, the two levels cooperate. While, on the meso level, intra-organizational pedagogical action is carried out regarding the exploration of topics for the program of an institution/organization, the macro level makes sure that individual skill groups contribute their knowledge to this planning process and that leeway for decision-making can be used in order to ensure flexibility and creativity.

*Networking knowledge islands to provide analytical pedagogical monitoring of program priorities*

We can distinguish at least 13 knowledge islands that require pertinent detailed knowledge to be able to manage a program flexibly while at the same time reacting to diverse developments in the environment and specifically to the
addressees and various target groups and to the participants in continuing education.

We therefore propose to dissolve the systematic planning process, without, however, neglecting any one factor, in order to achieve intense consolidation by being able to use the individual factors as knowledge islands in a more differentiated way, i.e., on the basis of theoretical and empirical impact knowledge, in a more selective, but also more elaborate manner. In such differentiated handling of research findings – in this context, knowledge islands, alignment action – for the interpretation of concrete planning situations with a claim to action, professional pedagogical planning manifests itself.

Fig. 1. A concept of macro-/meso didactic planning action through the networking of knowledge islands (Gieseke 2008, p. 57)

These knowledge islands will allow for deeper analyses which will in turn trigger new stimuli for planning processes that may establish two or three links related to locally crucial issues and allow releasing certain offerings or partial program areas for processing. The professionalism of this approach depends on what decisions can be made by using both the knowledge and the personal and overall available empirical research with respect to specific questions and on which alternatives are available. Let us look at a few examples:
1. Multiple courses run without any particular additional work-input, the funding tallies, there is a high level of satisfaction and adequate demand. In this case you would usually expect a keep-it-up assessment. On the other hand, you might, after a certain amount of time, also start wondering: have the subjects and/or competence requirements been expanded in the
meantime, have they even changed? Do we perhaps only address a small group? Could one reach other social sectors or groups through targeted marketing taking into account social background (see Tippelt et al. 2008)? Is the group of participants too limited or too diverse? In what way is that related to the organization’s goals, etc.? Which knowledge islands may then be used to answer these questions? In this case, the knowledge islands “participant analysis”, “announcement” and “evaluation” will perhaps be interrelated in order to find out which participants actually attend, whether the announcement had any impact on that and what insights the evaluation results provide on the issue. Based on these results and their interlacing, knowing that this in turn constitutes but a limited part of the spectrum, one might ask whether this area should be expanded, extended in some other way or supplemented by creating an intersection with other topics. This process of exploration and evaluation gives program planners deeper insight and allows them to develop new ideas and pose new questions. For the organization’s marketing it is crucial that these deliberations always take into account the environment with its trends, the media and other actors as well as the relevance to continuing education. If such courses and their specific program priorities are linked to a single contractor, the question arises when the time has come to talk about new, extended connections. This is just one of the occasions at which it would be helpful to be able to provide information on the basis of these or other combinations of knowledge islands. Internal, reflexive meso-didactic management will then become an inward-looking process; however, in its developments it will always have to refer to the environment if it wants to stand a chance to expand.

2. Another example: new research results may change competence requirements and require a revision of social and societal interpretations and internal discussions, but they may perhaps as yet not be perceived as general topics of adult education. What is needed? Certainly, the first question that will arise is whether there is a demand for these topics. Do we have lecturers who might take on some of the work; is there additional external funding from the European Union, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research or other sources? Which announcements should be made, which networks built up and why? Is there media or other support available? What should be the focal point of the public relations work? Which didactic forms might be chosen as an alternative in the process of program development and why? Here, our proposal interlinks program development with the search for and coordination with lecturers, the evaluation of research findings and with marketing as well as public relations work. If problems arise with participation in the courses offered, a new strategy for increasing the demand needs to be considered or the courses could be provided through networking with other organizations, etc.…
3. One final example: if social constellations (e.g. in a specific region) change, funding or networking collapses, educational policies change, if changed training options pose new challenges in continuing education for the organization, if new populations move to the area, if companies come or go, or if any other political or ecological events affect a region, the priorities of continuing education are placed under direct pressure to meet these new demands. The knowledge islands of ‘needs assessment’, ‘cost calculations’, and ‘target group positioning’ will then have to be processed (more) intensely in accordance with a growing network demand.

All three options for program planning briefly described and differentiated above resort to a complex process of alignment with a constantly changing environment and ever changing needs. This is accompanied by a proactive planning strategy, – successive planning activities.

**Successive planning as a long-term professional educational approach**

Successive planning is acting ahead and enquiring, from a professional and institutional perspective, into what educational-political, regional and economic developments are to be expected, into possible long-term cooperations with other institutions/organizations, into the needs of that part of the population that participates, into who is not participating and whether these population groups have other learning needs. Are there passages between lifestyle and education? Are there general needs for clarification that the organization/institution might want to address? Is there support for learning to learn in the form of educational counselling and should one participate in establishing local counselling regarding continuing education for the population on site? Which of these challenges are in accord with the objectives and tasks of one’s own institution or organization of adult/continuing education? Successive planning is not just about observing the market, but also aims to expand the learning options available to the local and regional population and not just be a contractor for third parties.

Developing continuing education by using knowledge islands is an inquisitive, enquiring, approach based on theoretical and empirical work and analysis, striving to come up with new knowledge, new topics in the diverse fields and institutions/organizations. This kind of planning action with its necessary analytical depth cannot be absorbed by a management. While it may be part of the latter’s management task to bundle these activities, it concedes professional pedagogical autonomy to the planners and ensures further pedagogical and professional training. Only active individuals with the ability to act in a self-responsible manner and with the corresponding institutional leeway are able to provide such permanent creative social presence. Educational management (see also Robak 2004) and program planning are complementary types of action that can still be divided according to the following pattern:
Fig. 2. Planning activities and educational management of the institution (updated, supplemented Gieseke 2000, p. 335; Gieseke 2003, p. 194; Gieseke 2005, pp. 60, Gieseke 2014)

**Bibliography**

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Netography

1. Fleige M., Reichart E., Themenstrukturen und -entwicklungen in der VHS im Spiegel von Statistik und Programmanalysen. Erkundungen am Beispiel


Makrodydaktyczna płaszczyzna planowania i podejmowania decyzji w edukacji dorosłych. Pomiędzy naukowymi, andragogicznymi wymogami, indywidualnymi potrzebami, wyzwaniami rynku i kontroli

Słowa kluczowe: płynna edukacja dorosłych, intermedialna edukacja dorosłych, koncepcja planowania z elastycznie wykorzystywanymi wyspami wiedzy, proces planowania jako proces zbliżania, badanie programów, padanie potrzeb, indukcyjny model planowania.

Streszczenie: Planowanie w edukacji dorosłych w Europie ma być zróżnicowane i elastycznie adekwatnie do uwarunkowań instytucjonalnych i organizacyjnych zależnych od rynku, aby odpowiednio reagować na potrzeby wynikające z kontekstu społecznego, ekonomiczno-gospodarczego i naukowego. Elastyczne planowanie ma również na celu uwzględnianie indywidualnych potrzeb i interesów wynikających z ducha czasów. Często te aktualne potrzeby kierują uwagę na nierozpoznane pod względem naukowym i teoretycznym fenomeny, które w życiu codziennym odgrywają istotną rolę.

Planowanie w edukacji dorosłych to codzienna czynność, którą wykonują organizacje i instytucje oświatowe dla swoich klientów, dbając o rozwój ich kompetencji i kwalifikacji. Planowanie może być też usytuowane „pomiędzy” różnymi instytucjami i reagować na potrzeby regionu. W obu przypadkach planowanie jest zbliżeniem się do wymagań środowiska, popytu, jak i wyzwań modernizacyjnych oraz wyników badań naukowych.

Planowanie wymaga permanentnego obserwowania różnych procesów, by tę wiedzę wykorzystać do tworzenia nowych programów w często sprzecznych uwarunkowaniach. Pomocne są przy tym wyspy wiedzy z indukcyjnego modelu planowania, które mogą być wykorzystywane pod określonym kątem. Oferują wsparcie w analizowaniu instytucji i otoczenia, by odsłonić nowe możliwości planowania. Tylko w ten sposób może być realizowana przez instytucje oświatowe funkcja społecznego sejsmografu.


Weiterbildung, in der Planungshandeln zum Tagesgeschäft gehört, ist entweder anderen Organisationen und Institutionen beigeordnet, d.h. sie sorgt für die jeweilige Institution und die Kompetenzentwicklung und Qualifikationen ihrer Mitarbeiter/innen, die im weitesten Sinne für die Institution von Nutzen sind. Sie kann sich aber ebenso intermediär platzieren und vernetzen und reagiert auf Anforderungen in einer Region. Dabei hat sie einen öffentlichen Charakter mit freiem Zugang für jedermann. In beiden Fällen ist Planungshandeln Ausgleichshandel, d.h. die Planer/innen reagieren auf Umweltanforderungen und Nachfrage sowie auf Modernitätsanforderungen und Forschungsbefunde.

Das Planungshandeln hat diese Prozesse permanent zu beobachten und für die Pro grammierung in den Wechselwirkungsprozessen zu nutzen. Dabei helfen die Wissensinseln aus dem induktiven Planungsmodell, die unter bestimmten Fragestellungen kombiniert werden. Sie bieten eine Unterstützung, um Entwicklungen in der Institution und im Umfeld analytisch zu betrachten und neue Planungsanforderungen freizulegen. Nur dadurch kann die Seismographenfunktion von Bildungsinstitutionen eingelöst werden.

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