

Lifelong Learning

Perspectives from beyond the classroom

Learning is a continuous, life-long endeavour that is not confined to the classroom or lecture hall, as the saying “to expand one’s horizon”¹ nicely points out. DAAD alumni and scholarship holders have most likely experienced this themselves, as studying and living in a foreign country requires a lot of learning in everyday life - not only in terms of language, but also in terms of local customs, societal norms and intangible knowledge. And those who have entered working life know that learning does not end with a university diploma and does not necessarily happen in the structured, formal way that educational institutions follow. Learning is a pervasive human experience that we will explore in more depth in our next conference from the 7th and 8th of October in Hamburg.

Formal vs. informal

Learning happens in a variety of forms. In Europe for example, there is traditionally a heavy focus on learning by formal means: education is based on writing and reading - as taught from early childhood in schools. However, there are many informal types of learning that can occur in any given setting such as through family, friends, fellow students and colleagues. How are informal learning processes valued as compared to formal ones in society? Furthermore, different capabilities and generational differences pose the question of inclusivity in educational institutions and beyond. Learning needs vary - older generations for example may need to learn to adapt to their changing health situations and to update their knowledge on recent digital developments while younger generations still need to learn to develop their professional paths, or the youngest ones, how to walk, talk or make a somersault.

Sustainable Development Goals

Unfortunately different groups in society may not always have equal access to the types of learning that are suitable for them. Social, geographical, economic or personal constraints can inhibit children from going to school and accessing learning resources. Consequently, many initiatives by governments and NGOs have focussed on making learning more inclusive, as enshrined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4. Moreover, initiatives such as UNESCO’s Learning Cities project, have been addressing the provision of *sustainable* learning opportunities for rural as well as urban communities (another issue at hand), with regard to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11.

A digital solution?

The emergence of eLearning in the age of the internet and smartphones has facilitated overcoming geographical boundaries. Early attempts at making academic literature more available as ‘open source’ have caused great discussions about the value of intellectual property and academic research vs. the value of open education. Nowadays there are millions of free academic lectures available for any person with internet access and an email

¹ Synonym for “learning” and “experiencing”

address. Is free online education the solution to the educational gap that has persisted across regional and social class differences globally? How is digitalisation promoting learning opportunities across Europe and Africa?

Studying abroad - Learning for life

Exchange programs, university cooperations and scholarships for studying abroad promote an exchange of knowledge across countries and cultures. They also foster a unique understanding of another culture, sometimes requiring a second or even third socialization and they push students out of their comfort zone into a lifetime experience that can have benefits for the greater good. Holding a conference with current and former exchange students, we will have the chance to dig deeper into the (personal) value of exchanges between European and African universities. Is it the exchange certification, is it the PhD, is it the friendships, or is it the cultural knowledge that eventually benefits (future) DAAD alumni? Are academic exchanges 'nice-to-have' or are they an essential part in forming conscious global citizens? Which importance do they carry for broader issues such as peace? Convening with over 50 knowledgeable alumni and scholarship holders who know the 'hard facts' of doing international exchanges, we will explore these questions together.