

## Reflections on Comparative Education Conferences: A European Perspective

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Are the conferences worldwide mimicking society's economic market trends? A quick look at the first page of various conferences shows that after the title and the dates of the conference, a description of the place occupies quite a large space. I encourage you to watch this short video from the 2008 European Association for International Education (EAIE) conference in Belgium that had 3,000 participants from 70 countries and offered 90 sections and 34 workshops:

<http://www.eaie.org/conference/video>

The conference received wide local media coverage and the sponsors were pleased with the exposure. Being global and the need for money is a recurring theme at many conferences. The travel attractiveness of the surroundings and the many possible excursions make one wonder if the conference organizers have partnered with the travel industry. Indeed, the conferences participatory fees are on the rise and the cancellation rules have become stricter making conference attendance unaffordable for many. However, if you have figured out your finances and have planned your trip, I can assure you that an international conference is a rewarding experience.

Last year, I attended the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on *Comparative Education and Teacher Training* organized by the Bulgarian Comparative Education Society and held in Tryavna, Bulgaria, from 29 June to 3 July 2009. Indeed, as I mentioned above the next sentence on the website was that "Tryavna is a beautiful, ethnographic and picturesque town located 250 km (ca.155 miles) from Sofia." As a longtime member of

the American CIES, I was curious to experience something different; I wanted to have an European experience. The language of the conference was English. The conference gathered 67 participants that included the following countries: Canada, Cyprus, Hong Kong, England, France, Germany, Iran, Israel, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Norway, Poland, Russia, Slovenia, Serbia, South Africa, Switzerland, Taiwan, Turkey, and the United States. The presentations were been arranged around four themes: Comparative Education as a University Discipline; Pre-service and In-service Teacher Training; Education Policy and Reforms; Higher Education, Lifelong Learning and Social Inclusion. While I attended only the comparative education section, I had enough time to mingle and make connections during the coffee breaks and breakfasts. The mindset of participants was open and ready for exchanges. I found the Bulgarian CIES conference well organized and not unlike other conferences I have attended; the discussions were thought provoking, and all in all the conference was a valuable experience. I would certainly consider returning to this conference in the future. As a participant, I received a free copy of the conference proceedings and I bought for 10 Euros *The Comparative Education at Universities World Wide* (second edition). Both books can be used in teaching comparative education as hands-on examples of comparative and international studies.

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