

The Arnoldshain Seminars: Past, Present and Future

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I. The Arnoldshain Seminars: main facts and History

What I can only do in the following is to give a personal account. As I remember it, the concept of the Arnoldshain Seminars evolved in several phases of group discussions. The first phase was my visit to Sao Paulo and Córdoba in 1994. At FEA I had given a lecture on the comparison of the aging process in Brazil, Argentina and Germany. I also had a meeting in an apartment in Lorena Flats with some colleagues to which Prof. Basilia Aguirre had invited. It was a first test for new ideas and many questions were postponed to a second meeting on my way back. Then I came to Córdoba and I still remember the meeting room in the Faculty of Economic Sciences at UNC with its huge table and comfortable leather chairs. I sat at the head of the table but not as president of the meeting of the 12 professors sitting to my left and right but rather like a witness, being grilled by a very sceptical jury on the merits of my ideas. But after some time the climate changed from a critical and distant scepticism to a very constructive one and during the ensuing discussion an outline of the future seminars arose so that a week later I arrived in Sao Paulo with a concrete proposal. Here the Córdoba process was repeated and the proposal became more polished and refined. In the end I had the approval of my Brazilian and Argentine colleagues and I had a project, which now needed acceptance by my own colleagues in Frankfurt and the financing institutions.

A year later the series of interfacultative seminars was started with the participation of scholars and students from the three faculties of Economics and Business Administration and have continued till today as can be seen in table 1.

II. Basic model of organization of these Seminars

These seminars were to be for scholars of all ages and status, about one third being students, one third doctoral students and young faculty and one third full professors. They were to be held every one-year and a half, the three faculties taking turns. There is a central organizing committee. Papers presented at the seminar are to be published.

One strength of these seminars is the personal basis, on which they are built. From the first seminar on, great importance was given to establishing good communication among all participants, group work and group discussion being given major importance. This personal basis, in my view, has proven to be a continuous strength, which has helped us to have high quality, intensive and harmonious seminars. But could it be that this is also a weakness? Usually

academics have cooperation in the scientific field when they find partners who work on the same topic, when they are willing to cooperate, and they go to meetings only when the topics are ones that are related to what they are doing. In this project we work with people, however, not simply because they come from institutions which are partners, but because of other privately held convictions.

Table 1

The Arnoldshain Seminars 1994 – 2002

Arnoldshain I: National and Comparative Research from Argentina, Brazil and Germany , October 18 – 20, 1995 in Frankfurt and Arnoldshain
Arnoldshain II: Structural transformation in Latin America and Europe. Learning from each other's experience , March 19 – 21, 1997 in Córdoba and Vaquerias
Arnoldshain III: Argentina, Brazil, and Germany: Comparative studies in structural transformation . October 18-21, 1998 in Sao Paulo and Ubatuba
Arnoldshain IV: Supranational Cooperation and Integration. Goods and Services vs Information . September 4 – 6, 2000 in Frankfurt and Arnoldshain:
Arnoldshain V : Adjusting to Globalization and Structural Changes in Argentina, Brazil and Germany September 27 th - October 1 st , 2002 in Cordoba and Vaquerias
Arnoldshain VI: ??¹

III. Successes and failures

Of course, it was a tremendous success, that these seminars could actually take place. This we can particularly appreciate after having overcome so many obstacles with Arnoldshain 4 and 5. It was also a big success that the papers for these seminars were actually published. And there were individual gains. Nevertheless, when we evaluate these seminars, we must not only look at the publications and the pleasant memories each of them have created. We must also take into account the **external effects**, which stem from these seminars, some of these I will mention in the next paragraphs.

III. 1. Visits of scholars

There was a promising start in the exchange of scholars. Thus Prof. Bender from USP spent several months in Frankfurt right after Arnoldshain 5, and also Prof. Basilia Aguirre from the same university spent some time there one or two years later. There was a visit of Prof. María Luisa Recalde from Córdoba to

¹ As it looks now, Arnoldshain 6 will take place September 2004 or March 2005 in Vaquerias and Córdoba.

Frankfurt, which was used to formulate a treaty between the faculties and for a lecture. Also Prof. Carlos Azzoni from USP visited Frankfurt twice. Of my Frankfurt colleagues, there were short stays combined with lectures by Bernd Spahn and Bertram Schefold.

On the whole, however, we must say that the potential of this type of exchange was not achieved.

III. 2. Projects

Common projects were realized in preparation for the Arnoldshain Seminars. But they were small and of short duration. Here we must say the same as for the exchange of scholars: the potential of this type of cooperation has not yet been completely used.

III. 3. Students Exchanges and Theses

Parallel to the Arnoldshain Seminars a student exchange between Frankfurt and the two other faculties was implemented. This implied certain institutional arrangements and improvements pertaining to the recognition of exams and grades, problems which were not easy to overcome, but which implied becoming more open on the institutional level.

It is most important that a new institution was created in the Universidad Nacional de Córdoba based on a project written by María Luis Recalde, allowing the different schools to consider courses taken by students in a foreign university to be formally valid for the curricula.

More successful was the use of the stay in one of the partner universities for writing a doctoral or master's thesis. There were very fruitful cooperation in several fields between USP and Frankfurt. Felix Nimmermann and a doctoral student of Prof. Aguirre were examples for the first category and in the second category there must be at least ten students of economics and business administration, who wrote their thesis in Córdoba and São Paulo. Much more would be possible and desirable.

III. 4. Trust and New Techniques as the basis of active communication

Through these seminars including their preparation and evaluation it was possible to create **a climate of trust and an infrastructure for communication** between the three faculties, which proved to be quite useful and could prove to be even more useful in the future.

Today it is hard to imagine, that establishing regular communication between professors of different universities could be achievement but in the early 90s it was. To prepare such an international seminar made it necessary to have regular, fast communication and it made it necessary to have e-mail to stay informed. These seminars pressed those colleagues who wanted to participate, to obtain and familiarize them with e-mail. So our exchange helped to introduce this innovation in the respective faculties.

The same holds for regular chats. When we had the first of the now regular chat exchanges with Cordoba and Sao Paulo we felt like Edison when he got his first telephone call through. Getting the regular chat established was a major achievement with many further external effects. You cannot imagine today what resistance existed, when we started. When we started even my own assistants were against it. And at the university level nobody thought it to be useful for scientific communication. For most people it was only for chatting in the true sense of the world: "Hello? How are you? Are you free tonight?"

(Our first chats with Cordoba and Sao Paulo were adventures creating an excitement like the one when the first telephone call happened or the first telegram was sent in the 19th century.)

Fixing the date for Arnoldshain V was a good example of what a chat can do. There were no dates, which were convenient for all three parties. But in a chat within 30 minutes a date was found to which all could agree.

This experience may have helped to crack the possibly most obstinate opponents, who now use chat and e-mail even when on trips. If that isn't something!!

The creation of a website is the latest innovation, which came to life in the preparation of this seminar. At first it was only for the organizing committee. Its use and value emerged during the last weeks of preparation. It could have a potential in facilitating communication and cooperation when we all learn to use it. Alexander's tutorial hopefully will be of great help here. It can also become a powerful instrument for public relations.

IV. Failures

I cannot mention any direct failures in the sense of fracases or disasters, although we were very close to them several times. On the other hand we cannot say that we were able to fulfil all hopes, visions, expectations and intentions we had hosted in Arnoldshain 1 and 2 and we have learned to be more modest and maybe realistic. Thus we were not able to mount international cooperative comparative studies by teams from the three member countries. There were several attempts made in this direction and some even produced some results. But the enthusiasm at the beginning of our work overlooked the problems we were to encounter. The why will be mentioned in a later paragraph. But what do these failures tell us? Should we stop trying?

V. International Cooperative Comparative Studies: Problems and Potential

I think we have learned that it is very difficult to cooperate internationally on a theme. There are many problems, problems of data, conflictive interests, problems of finance and communication, methodological differences, etc. There are the conflicting demands on our time. Also as scholars we are all involved in our own research projects and we are strongly involved in other activities. Neither our institutional framework nor our scholarly socialization fosters cooperation.

On the other hand comparing is a very productive activity in all our research and teaching. It is a rich field for testing hypotheses and developing theories and ideas aside from widening the horizons of those participating in it. To the researchers and teachers it offers a wide field of possibilities. Let me mention just a few that interest economists: most frequent are comparisons in the field of economic policy. Here we find them in various forms: the comparisons of economic performance, of instruments and objectives and of institutions. They are used to inquire, which possibilities of action exist in certain situations and to find out about the implications and results of different policy alternatives. We can also observe, that more and more of these comparisons themselves become instruments of policy, politicians and economists using them as a means to argue for or against determined policies.

The second field is that of comparisons of economic phenomena such as inflation, unemployment, economic development, poverty, structural change etc. Depending on the goal of the comparison we can discern four types of this form of comparisons: exploratory comparisons, which try to find out about the nature, importance, impact and characteristics of a problem. They try to answer such questions as how can the phenomenon be described and defined? What are its elements and its boundaries?

When we have answers to these questions we can look for the factors causing the phenomenon and for theoretical explanations, i e. perform comparison aiming at explanations presupposing that such theories already exist. However, international comparisons can also show the need for new theories. This was the case in the discussion of the Phillipps-Curve and the phenomenon of stagflation. This type of comparisons can be called theory developing. Finally there are the very demanding and difficult comparisons serving to test hypotheses.

There is a very fascinating third form of comparisons, which we can call problem-oriented comparisons. This type of comparison is based on the fact that societies, countries and cultures often have to deal with similar problems but find different ways of dealing with them. The research question here is how do different societies react when they are confronted with the same problem such as aging or structural change? The comparisons of these reactions in different segments or subsystems of the society can lead to the the discovery of new views of and new ways of dealing with the problem.

And last but not least comes the field of economic systems and governance. This is the oldest field of international economic comparisons dating back to the ancient Greeks, having a first climax in the German Historical School and a second climax after the development of the soviet type of economic systems. Today the interests in this field are directed more towards the transformation and evolution of economic systems and towards parts of economic systems or partial systems such as pension systems or health care.

In view of this great potential of comparisons and present trends of development of the world and international politics, as well as the needs of teaching and learning, and the internationalization of research, it seems likely that the need for this type of approach is increasing just as the development of telecommunication will help to pull down barriers preventing cross border research cooperation.

VI. Do, Could or Should the Arnoldshain Seminars Have a Future?

I think the difficulties we had in preparing these seminars could easily encourage us to halt. On the other hand we must look at the impressive spectrum of interesting studies and papers to be presented. The fact that Arnoldshain 5 is taking place now after the many seemingly insurmountable problems we had to overcome, could encourage us to continue this effort. We are the future and it depends on each of us. If we find it desirable to continue we must put our heads together, analyze our mistakes, and look at the chances to improve.