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## **ESREA Active Democratic Citizenship and Adult Learning (ADCAL) Research Network Conference**

*Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, the University of Algarve*

in Faro, Portugal, 24-26 October 2024

### **First Call for Papers**

#### **Thinking against the grain: Critical Pedagogy, Popular Education and Revolution**

We find ourselves amidst an era of acute crises. Since our last conference in May 2023, the global societal challenges have intensified. Inequalities have become more pronounced, exacerbated by uneven wealth distribution that has solidified further post-pandemic. Class disparities have sharpened, and new conflicts have arisen and remained unresolved. The consequences of the ecological catastrophe are becoming increasingly evident, and while the rhetoric of mainstream politics includes aspirations towards a green future, it appears that political efforts are not making any significant strides to addressing the systemic causes of the climate crisis. In certain parts of Europe, political regimes are moving towards authoritarianism, and even elections, as a primary expression of citizenship, have been compromised<sup>1</sup>. These intersecting crises continue to perpetuate inequalities and discrimination, while also further dividing societies, thus contributing to the fragmentation of communities.

All this serves to remind us of the importance of active citizenship to democracy. Meaningful active citizenship depends on the sustained political engagement of individuals, groups, communities, and movements. Dissent and demands for accountability, as well as for recognition, redistribution, and full participation are the wellsprings of living democracy. Research tells us that intense and widespread participation in active citizenship also generates rich social learning and leads to the creation of new knowledge inside and outside formal education (Eyerman & Jamison, 1990). Scholarly interest in such movement learning has increased greatly in recent years (Atta & Holst, 2023). This, amongst other things, reminds us of how active citizenship has led, more or less directly, to some of the most significant contributions in the field of adult education - such as the development of radical popular education (Hall, Clover & Scandrett, 2011; Jara, 2010; Manicom & Walters, 2012; Mayo, 2020), critical pedagogy (Darder, 2015; Freire, 1972; hooks, 1994; McLaren & Leonard, 2001; Torres, 2019 inter alia), and participatory research (Hall, 1981; Rappaport, 2020).

We know that intense forms of active citizenship are often hard to sustain and require a great deal of tenacity and hope in transformative social change. Social movements and living democracies relying on, and feed into, a collective capacity to imagine alternative futures (Barnett, 2014; Castoriadis, 1975). In previous conferences and activities of this network we have explored the themes of hope and possibility and how they relate to the field of adult education in some detail. In many quarters people discern a winnowing and narrowing of this imaginative capacity. Part of this is due to failure of state socialism and national liberation struggles to achieve their goals. The decline of radical imagination can also be connected

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20240202IPR17327/serbia-did-not-fulfil-its-commitments-to-free-and-fair-elections-say-meps>

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to the neoliberalisation of society and education globally (Brennner, Peck & Theodore, 2010; Harvey, 2005). Fifty years of the promotion of individualism, competition, and marketisation, the key messages of what have been termed ‘neoliberal public pedagogies’ (Giroux, 2004), have also corroded our capacity to envision progressive change. Alongside institutional and policy changes, this has had a remarkable impact on adult education (Bowl, 2017). The financial and political crises of the past fifteen years, the growth of anti-democratic far right and fascist groups, increasing inequalities, and the unfolding climate crisis mentioned earlier have all contributed to an escalating mood of pessimism and even despair.

Under these circumstances, we want to take the opportunity and think ‘against the grain’. For this, we turn to the idea of revolution. Revolutions are especially intense points in social change processes and have shaped what active citizenship and democracy mean. It is impossible to understand the past 200 years without taking account of revolutions as an ideal, as a constellation of images, and as political and cultural events (Traverso, 2021). Revolutions mobilize bodies and minds sparked by dissatisfaction with the status quo and give rise to novel ideas and visions of the future radically at odds with the present. They have a disruptive character as they interrupt the linearity of history and challenge the established hegemonic order and have opened up a space to imagine new and more just societies. Think of revolutions in France and Haiti in the 1790s, Russia in 1917, Portugal in 1974, and of events in Eastern Europe in 1989-1991. Or the wave of anticolonial revolutions that sought to dismantle structures of exploitation and subjugation throughout the mid twentieth century. Their aim was not merely political change, but the establishment of new political, legal, and economic frameworks free from external interference and domination. Think also of the impact of failed revolutions in Spain in 1936 or Chile in 1973 or globally in 1968. Consider also how the reality and perceptions of the ‘colour’ revolutions of Easter Europe have come to shape what is taking place in Europe today, especially in the Ukraine. The successes and failures of these events shaped the political imaginations and conceptions of democracy in remarkable ways. This ‘revolutionary horizon’ has also been fundamental to the history of adult education (Steele, 2001).

Since the ‘revolutionary horizon’ exemplified above has also been fundamental to the history of adult education (Steele, 2001), we want to ask, how our field, and especially conceptions of democracy and citizenship, has been shaped by political revolutions and the sorts of values, resources and knowledge they have created. This of course includes scepticism towards the idea revolutionary change. For example, while revolutionary situations continue to occur frequently (Barker, Dale & Davidson, 2021), the concept of revolution itself seems to have passed out of public discourse. This social fact- and this is a novelty in terms of modern history -is worthy of consideration in terms of what it discloses about contemporary society. Although there are protests and uprisings, it seems that they may not necessarily result in the fundamental and long-term political change typically associated with revolutions. For instance, while the 5th of October Revolution in Serbia resulted in the immediate ousting of the Milošević regime, expected political changes did not endure in the long run. Despite initial optimism and hope for democratic reforms, Serbia did not transition to a functioning democracy. This topic also raises questions about how cultural and educational processes link, or not, to political revolutions. We are especially interested in how adult education can contribute to democratic revolutions against authoritarian regimes, and how it can continue to facilitate deep-rooted post-revolutionary transformations. In Portugal, the spontaneous social movements that emerged during the revolutionary process in 1974 - and our conference coincides with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of these seismic events- led to an attempt to create an adult education system based on the many civil society groups active in this field. In the long run, however, several factors combine to push both popular education and adult education to the margins of society. We wish to open up space to discuss these sorts of events and if resisting authoritarianism today requires new coordinates or might need to salvage ideas from older revolutionary traditions.

As these examples indicate revolutions are not just political phenomena. They come in many forms - from technological, or conceptual, to moral, national, and even personal. Nor do they always take the form of a dramatic ‘event’. As Raymond Williams (1961) points out, cultural revolutions can occur through discontinuous, lengthy, incremental processes. Relevant questions for our research network to explore

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include: How are conceptions of education - of what is worth knowing and how it can be learned - utterly transformed? How and why do new paradigms gain traction? Reflecting on recent discussions within the ADCAL network, it prompts us to inquire: In what ways do major strands of adult education theory, such as critical pedagogy and transformative learning, go beyond merely acknowledging grievances and critical perspectives, and instead actively propel social change through the process of radical imagination, hope and courage (Ksanabish, 2019)? How can engagement with dialogical exchanges facilitate a collective envisioning of alternative realities and mobilize individuals toward transformative action? How might we work with these key theories to avoid reducing social change to reproducing the commodified lifestyle and individualism of neoliberal capitalism and instead generate robust social movements?

Is critical pedagogy today stretched in so many directions that the political and ethical commitments that once defined its purpose, including a commitment to revolutionary change, have become invisible (McLaren, 2000)? Can the same be said of the more explicitly radical and movement orientated ideas of popular education? In what contexts and what ways is popular education still revolutionary? Has the institutionalization of popular education suppressed class issues, subdued the working class, and side-lined questions of exploitation or on the other hand sustained and developed popular education? Can we read the differences between different forms of popular education (for instance in Latin America and Scandinavia) in terms of very different ways of thinking about social transformation and democracy? How does political disappointment, even grief, shape our ideas of educational purpose, pedagogical practice and conceptions of popular education and transformative learning, having in mind that this is enough for meaningful collective engagement? More generally what types of metaphors, models, or maps are fruitful to furthering our understanding of revolutions and paradigmatic transformations from an adult education perspective? We invite engagement with these, and other questions based on empirical examples, explorations of methodology, as well as conceptual work.

We also wish to invite reflections on revolution, critical pedagogy, and popular education in relation to ecology and sustainability. The present environmental crises are comprised of many interlocking elements. Climate change, biological degradation, species extinction, and natural resource depletion are driving an increasing number of people to crave radical change which treats social justice and sustainability as inextricably linked (Bookchin, 1992, Bellamy Foster, 2021; Bresnihan, 2021). As exemplified by the current degrowth movements (Schmelzer, Vetter & Vansintjan, 2022), which are gaining traction in both civic and academic contexts, there is a thirst for comprehensive and profound economic, social, and cultural change. Many proponents of degrowth and decolonial movements demand that we break with modernism and capitalism (Maison, 2022). Arguably these are revolutionary movements which nevertheless choose to eschew the language of revolution. Spurred by environmental crises, these movements take a complex, holistic approach to such issues, arguing for the intertwined co-dependence of social justice and ecological sustainability which offers new ways of thinking about the temporality and goals of social transformation. Adaptation, mourning of the passing world, working in the cracks, building in the 'shell of the old world', reconnecting with indigenous forms of wisdom – these are all offered as strategies for a needed social transformation. What, if anything, does the idea of revolution - of rupture and 'a world turned upside down' - have to offer in this context? Or is the idea of revolution produced by the very same instrumental and anthropocentric logic that underpins the ecological crisis and should be abandoned? And finally, what might be the tasks of critical pedagogy (Lange, 2023) and what are, or should be, the coordinates of a renewed popular education in the face of the ecological crisis? In exploring all these questions, we would very much welcome reflections on popular education across and beyond Europe.

Besides contributions regarding these specific themes and questions, the ADCAL network welcomes other contributions dealing with the nature, possibilities, and limits of adult education in encouraging active citizenship and promoting democracy as well as relations between and changing roles of adult education and active citizenship, adult education, democracy and democratization, popular education and social movement learning, adult learning and (active) citizenship, democracy and democratization, local, national and global citizenship.

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The conference is open to researchers from all disciplines and perspectives relevant to adult education and involved in the full range of sectors and sites of practice linked to adult learning. We actively encourage various formats and modes of communication of research at the event. We particularly want to emphasize that we would prefer not to restrict the invitation solely to researchers from Europe; instead, it would be especially significant for us to open a dialogue with participants from the Global South.

We intend for this to be a convivial, stimulating, and dialogical event. As a result, the conference will be structured in a way that encourages a high level of exchange and discussion.

We welcome your participation,

Fergal Finnegan, Maynooth University

Maja Maksimović, University of Belgrade

Diana Holmqvist, Linköping University

Conveners of the ESREA Research Network on Active Democratic Citizenship and Adult Learning

### **When and where**

24-26 October 2024, in Faro, Portugal, hosted by the Research Centre for Adult Education and Community Intervention (CEAD), Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, the University of Algarve.

### **Abstract and paper guidelines**

The deadline for the submission of abstracts is 28th April (acceptance will be announced by 27th May).

Early bird registration by 29<sup>th</sup> July.

Full papers (5,000- 8,000 words) to be submitted by 30 September.

We welcome other modes of dissemination apart from written papers (such as panel discussions, film, workshops, drama piece etc.). Please ensure that the content and structure used in such alternative formats are described in the proposal. Abstracts should be one side of A4 maximum (500 words in 12 point, in a Word references using APA) and should include a title, name of the author(s), institutional affiliation, and contact details as well. Abstracts with author detail documents should be submitted to [adcal.esrea@gmail.com](mailto:adcal.esrea@gmail.com).

The conference language will be English.

The following criteria will be used to review proposals:

- The relevance to adult education theory, policy and/or practice;
- The relevance to the conference themes;
- The clarity of the theoretical and conceptual framework;
- If the proposal is empirical, the background, method, results and implications should be clearly set out.

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## Conference Fees

ESREA member: 120 €

Non-member: 180 €

Student: 50 €

The conference fee includes conference materials, lunches, coffee-breaks, and a light dinner (24th July).

The conference dinner (26th July) will be optional.

## Registration and Payment

Please check the conference website - to be published in the 2nd Call for Papers - for the registration form and payment instructions.

## Organising committee

Amanda São Vicente, António Fragoso, Carla Vilhena, Catarina Doutor, Liliana Paulos, Sílvio Ponte, Sandra Valadas (University of Algarve).

## ESREA bursaries

3 bursaries for PhD Students are available. To submit the application for a bursary, when you submit your abstract, you should include in a separate file all the relevant information regarding your academic position, as well as a letter with reasons for applying (e.g., lack of funding from your institution). Please note that the Secretary of ESREA will check that the students (or their institutions) are members of ESREA and whether they have already been awarded a bursary recently.

## About the Research network ADCAL

### (Active Democratic Citizenship and Adult Learning)

What, if anything, is the role of adult learning and education in fostering active democratic citizenship and the making of a democratic society? The ADC network is dedicated to exploring these central and longstanding questions through research, debate and discussion of active citizenship by studying and reflecting on these issues. We are currently particularly interested in adult learning in social movements; civic education for adults; the social and political construction of citizenship in relation to various discourses on adult learning and education and the historical and contemporary role of popular education. The ADC network welcomes a variety of approaches dealing with the nature, possibilities and limits of adult education in encouraging active citizenship and promoting democracy as well as relations between and changing roles of:

- adult education and active citizenship,
- adult education, democracy and democratization,
- popular education and social movement learning,
- adult learning and (active) citizenship, democracy and democratization,
- local, national and global citizenship.



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## About ESREA (European Society for Research on the Education of Adults)

ESREA's mission is to support the advancement of high quality research on the education and learning of adults in Europe by sustaining:

- co-operation among researchers, in the European context conceived in the broadest geographical terms;
- development of research and dissemination of results in all areas of adult and continuing education;
- training of early researchers and continuing professional development of researchers;
- relationships with other European organizations and the appropriate national organizations.

To find out more about ESREA please visit [www.esrea.org](http://www.esrea.org)

To apply for membership please visit [www.esrea.org/about-us/membership](http://www.esrea.org/about-us/membership)