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EDITORIAL

Adult education today stands at a crossroads, as it must move away from a merely functionalist understanding of learning as a tool for adapting to the labour market and generating economic growth. Increasingly, the proactive and transformative role of adult education is coming to the fore, which is essential for addressing complex societal challenges. These are today often grouped under the concept of polycrisis, which encompasses interwoven threats, from ecological collapse and social inequalities to the erosion of democratic institutions (Albert, 2024). In such a dynamic and risky environment, adult education cannot merely operate as compensatory; rather, it must assume the role of an active initiator of societal change. It must empower adults not only for survival and adaptation to crises but primarily for the active co-creation of alternative, sustainable, and more just societal arrangements.

The theoretical background of this shift represents a conceptual expansion of transformative learning theory. While the original theory focused primarily on individual cognitive changes, contemporary approaches emphasize the necessity of broader societal learning. Formenti and Hoggan-Kloubert (2023) note that today transformative learning is considered one of the most useful frameworks for addressing wicked problems, such as preserving democracy and integrating marginalised groups. The transition from strictly individual reflection to community action allows adult education processes to be transformed into a space for strengthening civic participation, solidarity, and collective empowerment.

Enacting this proactive orientation requires critical reflection on didactic and methodological approaches that instead of mere knowledge transfer promote social justice and peace education. Kastner and Motschilnig (2022) argue in their research that a thoughtful intersection of adult education, transformative learning, and participatory action research creates a democratic learning space. This space functions not only as an educational environment but also as a source of hope, as it offers participants not just new skills but empowers them for active political action and emancipation. Thus, adult education directly contributes to alleviating structural inequalities and building sustainable peace, as it develops critical consciousness and the ability for dialogic conflict resolution among participants in local environments.

Realising this emancipatory potential poses significant challenges for adult educators. Their role changes drastically – rather than classic mediators of information they become moderators of demanding processes, capable of navigating emotional, relational, and political dynamics associated with personal and societal transformation (Formenti &

Hoggan-Kloubert, 2023). Educators must be aware of the uneven distribution of power in educational situations and consciously act towards its deconstruction, which is especially important when working with vulnerable groups. This work requires a high degree of professional reflexivity and pedagogical autonomy, which is often limited by bureaucratic requirements for measurability and quick results, reducing the space for authentic transformative processes.

Despite systemic barriers, proactive adult education remains a key mechanism for promoting societal resilience. If adult education truly wants to respond to the challenges of modern times, it must rethink its social role, return to its emancipatory roots, and transcend the focus on human capital production. It must become a driving force of relational living, enabling individuals and communities to maintain human dignity in times of uncertainty and actively build an inclusive future.

In this issue of *Studies in Adult Education and Learning*, we present a content mosaic of contributions that raise important questions about contemporary adult education. The authors illuminate the importance of learning for peace, technological adaptations, and the inclusion of all generations in lifelong education processes through scientific analyses and practice reports.

We open the issue with a contribution by Isabell Kempf titled *Educating for Peace: The Role of Adult Learning in Rebuilding Communities and Preventing Conflict*. The author establishes the role of adult education in community rebuilding and conflict prevention. She emphasizes the transformative potential of learning in crisis environments, drawing on recent frameworks from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). She understands lifelong learning as a catalyst for sustainable peace, as it helps individuals develop empathy and solidarity, which are essential for active democratic participation.

A theoretical enhancement to these endeavours is presented by a study analysing scientific frameworks in the field of peace education. In her work *Theoretical Frameworks Underpinning Adult Peace Learning and Education: Findings from a Systematic Review,* Amina Isanović Hadžiomerović finds that the potential of adult education in peace building has not yet been fully exploited. Through a systematic review of literature, the author identifies ten theoretical frameworks, among which transformative learning and participatory methods stand out. The purpose of the contribution is a stronger theoretical consolidation of peace education within the adult education field, enabling better design for future educational programmes.

From questions of global peace, the view shifts to workers' rights and their education in changing economic conditions. In the article *A Workers' Education Curriculum with No Production Issues: Gaps in Workers' Education in South Africa*, Mondli Hlatshwayo analyses the misalignment of workers' education with the modern transformation of work processes. Based on deep interviews, the author warns that curricula in South Africa focus primarily on wage and political questions, while neglecting production and new

technologies. Such a gap allows employers to regulate questions of work pace and skills exclusively in accordance with their profit interests.

Technological changes, however, affect not only industry but also educational spaces in higher education. Christina Hümmer and Regina Egetenmeyer's contribution *More Than Just a Question of Media Technology: The Design of Synchronous Hybrid Learning Spaces – A Literature Review on Current Empirical Findings in the German Higher Education Landscape* addresses the challenges of synchronous hybrid learning. The authors analyse seventeen studies through a systematic review of literature in the German higher education space. Results indicate that the instructor must consider content appropriateness in addition to technological equipment and establish clear participation rules that enable the interaction of all participants regardless of their location.

Beyond digitalisation, a significant challenge for adult education remains adapting to the needs of an aging population. In a discussion titled *Reflections of Educators of Older Adults on the Challenges and Opportunities of Their Professional Development: The Case of the Faculty of Active Wisdom at the University of Ljubljana,* Meta Furlan and Urška Gruden analyse how experts view their role in a long-life society. The authors use semi-structured interviews in a qualitative case study and find that educators require specialised didactic approaches and greater institutional support. Their results highlight the necessity of establishing a structured system of professional development, which would include mentorship and recognition of competencies with micro-credentials.

Reflection on individual needs in the last scientific article expands to the question of systemic accessibility of education for different societal groups. In *Understanding Diversity in Adult Education: The Key to Empowering Varied Groups,* authors Mirčeva, Rupnik Vec, and Brečko examine the accessibility of educational opportunities in Slovenia and, based on the statistical analysis of data from a survey on adult education and learning, identify three groups of participants that differ by employment status and income. They find that the unemployed are hindered primarily by finances, while the employed are hindered by time pressure, therefore proposing greater employer involvement and a shift of employee education into working time.

Scientific findings are further supplemented by reports that connect theory with practice in local environments. Dušana Findeisen's contribution *On the Fringe of Dr. Pietro Spranger's Lecture in the EPUO Project* reflects on the influence of innovative learning environments on adult education. The author emphasizes that physical and virtual spaces, such as museums and city streets, promote the visibility of learning for older adults and strengthen their inclusion in society. Through the concept of learning lighthouses, she advocates for lifelong learning that enables personal growth and the search for an individual's own identity in addition to functional skills. The importance of learning for personal and societal transformation is further illuminated by an essay on peace activism as an active stance of the individual. In the essay *Living Peace Activism – Adult Education for Peace*, Jasmina Mirčeva presents peace as a dynamic process and moral responsibility

of every individual. She draws on the thoughts of great peace activists, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Hannah Arendt, and establishes peace as an active political state based on dialogue. The contribution highlights the adult education profession as a strong force for developing the critical thinking skills necessary for non-violent conflict resolution.

An interview with experts working directly in the field brings us deeper insight into the practical experiences of peace building. Jasmina Mirčeva's conversation titled *Thinking Peace, Living Peace, and Advocating Peace – Interview with Dr. Maja Ladić and Dr. Eva Marn* hosts experts in the field of peace activism and human rights. Based on experiences from crisis hotspots in Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the interviewees emphasize the role education plays in overcoming prejudice. Their reflections encourage solidarity with refugees and an active rejection of violence, as peace requires continuous effort to understand the other.

We conclude the issue with a Urška Gruden's presentation of a new publication that connects cultural heritage and educational tourism. The monograph *Thematic Path as a Strategy for Lifelong Learning* summarises the findings of the international project BEroots. The handbook, edited by Meta Furlan, presents the results of cooperation between experts and local communities in the cross-border space between Italy and Slovenia. The text is based on the conceptual apparatus proposed by Vogt and Weber, and develops useful explanations for various groups of readers, from experts to local hikers in the Vipava Valley.

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