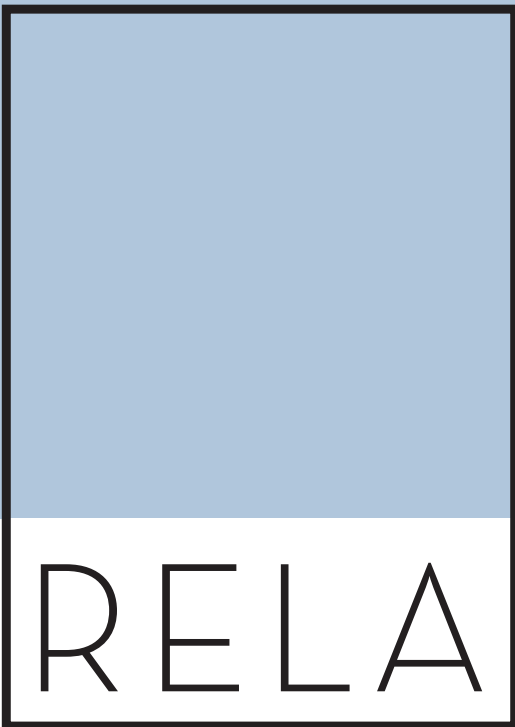# Sustainability: Place, space and pedagogy in adult learning and education

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The challenge of sustainability: Still a long way to go?

We face enormous and unprecedented ecological and social challenges and clearly need to develop much more sustainable modes of development and living. This is, of course, not a new idea and a policy concern with sustainability can be dated back to at least the *Limits of Growth* report from 1972 for the Club of Rome (Meadows et al., 1972). However, the need to address sustainability in and through policy has taken on greater urgency in recent years and, in 2015, the global community adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2015). This call was the result of a growing global alarm at the pace of socio-ecological degeneration, most notably but not solely the climate crisis, as well as the distinct but connected problems of inequality and social injustice – also in terms of who is generating respectively suffering from the impacts of socio-ecological degeneration.

While there is a widely shared agreement that there is 'no time to waste' (Wildemeersch et al., 2023), yet we are still failing badly in addressing social, economic and ecological sustainability. The nine 'earth system boundaries' identified by Rockström et al. (2023; see also Foster, 2017) which ensure the planet is safe – that are sufficient biological diversity, fresh water, land cover as well as a stability in climate, the ozone layer, nutrient cycles and the avoidance of excessive aerosol loading, ocean acidification and chemical pollution – are under enormous pressure. In terms of economic and social sustainability the polarisation of wealth and power has also worsened (Sayer, 2015). If this trend continues unabated, we will, according to Thomas Piketty (2014), the French economic historian, undo any progress in wealth (re)distribution made over the past four

generations in the Global North and further widen the gap between affluent countries and those that are so-called 'less developed' economies. These are matters of existential importance, long understood by scientists and recognised by many policymakers, yet, we appear to be unable to act effectively and imaginatively. What these policies on sustainability make very clear is that this is not only a crisis of the physical environment, but also a crisis of the cultural and social environment, of systems of representation and institutions through which our society understands and responds (or neglects to respond) to these challenges: hence the crisis.The failure to exert political impact and stop further environmental and social degradation is both startling and concerning. It has resulted, according to Adam Greenfield (2024), in a systemic crisis which is only beginning to unfold – which he calls the 'Long Emergency'.

Research in adult learning and education (ALE) on sustainability

Meeting these policy goals and targets and the wider civilisational challenge of creating sustainable societies in the medium term are, thus, the most pressing tasks of all the generations who are living in today's society. It is young people in particular, for example by the Youth for Climate Movement, who are today saying 'welcome to our world', that is, welcome to a world that is heading for catastrophic global warming for many species in many places of the earth. This is necessarily also an issue for adult education, as both researchers and practitioners must consider what has fundamentally changed in the relationship between the older and younger generations or how adult education can never be just about individual growth or fulfillment, but always and above all about (shaping and caring for) a shared world. We can observe how the articulation of the 2015 SDGs was followed by the Incheon declaration in 2015 at the World Education Forum. Accordingly, United Nations' (2015, p. 17) target 4.7 of SDG 4 states: 'By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)'. The commitment to sustainability, understood through the SDGs, has defined the work of key adult education International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) in recent years and has served as an important catalyst to shift sustainability to the top of also adult education's agenda.

However, while questions of social justice and equality have been a constitutive aspect of scholarship on ALE, the research on adult education related to environmental and sustainability issues is not extensive. Relatively little attention has been given to sustainability issues among adult education researchers which has to do, in part, with the fact that over the past two decades, lifelong learning policies have been increasingly defined by the advance of the neoliberal economic agenda. In consequence, research in the broad field of sustainability education often seem to be content with a 'transmissive (shallow)' approach rather than with a 'transformative (deeper)' one (Griswold, 2017, p. 8). In a similar way, Violeta Orlović Lovren and Katarina Popović argue that, both 'sustainability and lifelong learning serve as terms and conceptions that are turned into general slogans' (Orlović Lovren & Popović, 2018, p. 13), critized of being used rather as policy measures towards objectives of enhancing economic competitiveness. They point out that, despite the fact that adult education and sustainability issues appear to be natural allies, 'it is difficult if not impossible, to discuss what the role of adult education is – and whether it is considered an inherent part of the education goals that will lead to sustainability' (2018, p. 2).

There are two noteworthy clusters of existing, somewhat overlapping, ALE scholarship which have tried to address this gap. First of all, there is a body of work, a

great deal of it from Canada, that has linked sustainability to transformative learning. Edmund O'Sullivan (1999; O'Sullivan et al., 2002) was an important figure in initiating this line of research which has been slowly building over the past two decades and is now a well-developed body of work (Finnegan, 2023; Košmerl & Mikulec, 2022). The core proposition here is achieving a greater level of sustainability will require a major shift in cultural assumptions about the relationship between the nature, human and non-human animals (see Lange & O'Neill, 2018; Lange, 2012, 2018a, 2018b). Initially building on Mezirow's (1991) account of perspective transformation as a complex, often difficult, process of modifying and replacing our assumptions this has developed beyond this framing through the exploration of alternative conceptions of epistemology from deep ecology, spiritual traditions, systems thinking, and environmental activism. Here 'the hope for an epochal perspective transformation […] serves as a type of background premise, sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit, in presenting empirical material on a range of subjects' (Finnegan, 2023, p. 125) such as courses on environmental education (e.g. Gal & Gan, 2020; Walsh et al., 2020) sometimes with a place based element (Brooks & Brooks, in press) or changes in consciousness (Moyer & Sinclair, 2020; Williams, 2013) and through environmental activism (Kluttz & Walter, 2018; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003).

The second cluster seeks to connect radical popular education, typically aligned with feminist and/or socialist values, to questions of sustainability (von Kotze & Walters, 2023). As one might expect, in this tradition Freire remains an important point of reference (Clover et al., 2012; Hall, 2009; Foley, 1999; Misiaszek, 2021; Misiaszek & Torres, 2019; Scandrett et al., 2010, etc.)[1]. The key idea here is that mass mobilisation from 'below' is vital for social and ecological sustainability. Although there is a stronger emphasis on time and history than on space and place in this tradition there is nevertheless an interesting spatial dimension which goes beyond a focus on the ordering of hierarchies of power in social space. Freire (1978) is emphatic that a key aspect of popular education is the exploration and celebration of the specificity of local culture. The value of situated knowledge in a given place at a certain conjuncture in tandem with the exploration of the particular way structures of domination and exploitation are experienced, and can be resisted, are constitutive and defining ideas in this tradition (Freire, 1972, 1975, 1978, 1994; Freire & Macedo, 1987). The emphasis is 'digging in' into the knowledge of a given community in order to then move outwards building links between particular communities and wider social movements (see also Horton et al., 1990; Kirkwood & Kirkwood, 1989). In this regard it is worth remembering that there is a direct link between the development of participatory action research (PAR) and radical ALE (Fals-Borda, 1999; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Hall, 2005; Rappaport, 2020). Many researchers in this tradition connect transformative change and sustainability to the development of a new ecology of knowledges in education and society (Tandon et al., 2016). Probably the most significant development in recent years in terms of this tradition in ALE has been the PIMA network which publishes bulletins and organises events.

In both this transformative and critical view on education, ALE research on sustainability emphasizes the role and impact of educators as being much more than edu-ecological technicians, rather 'participatory contributors' (Lange, 2018a, p. 411), and of the learners themselves as being much more than passive recipients of the sustainability agenda, but 'agents in constructing a different trajectory of societies' (Barrett, 2016, p. 108). The importance of space (often connected to the dynamics of global society) and place (often associated with valuing the local) becomes evident when the emphasis is on enriching 'the principles and values of sustainable development in communities, educational institutions and individuals, striving to change the existing human, social and

environmental relations and power structures' (Košmerl & Mikulec, 2022, p. 175). The efforts already made in adult education practices that educators *and* learners, can become 'responsible constituent *of* the environment, rather than just a distant observer' (Wildemeersch et al., 2023, p. 12; emphasis in original) offers key incentives to overcome instrumental approaches of ESD as a learning technology and outcome production. In addressing these educational challenges in recent years, a number of ALE researchers (such as Brooks, 2019) have turned to feminist thinking on entanglement (Barad, 2007) and relationality across species (Haraway, 2016). As human beings, we are entangled with the other species that make up this world. Being able to respond to the sustainability issues of today is about acting upon and with these entanglements (Haraway, 2016). This means, first of all, in being response-able, one does not escape from the complexity of the world but faces one's entanglement and the trouble that make up our world. Secondly, this also implies that responses cannot be known in advance. It is in the relationship, in intra-action in a particular place and time that response-ability takes place. The same applies for the living beings, they themselves only come into being in these entanglements (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017; Haraway, 2016). It is in this web of relations that all living species exist.

Space, place and sustainability: Challenges and emerging foci for ALE research

Our main aim with this Special Issue, in line with Latour (2018), is to emphasize the importance of rediscovering the earth we live in rather than searching for a new world. This requires far more ingenuity, infinitely more insight and a level of mobilisation and institutional inventiveness than what was required to sending a few cosmonauts to Mars. In an accelerated world driven by the logic of capitalist accumulation and the fantasy of endless growth our experience of space is fragmented and place is experienced as a site of loss, dislocation and nostalgia rather than connection or rediscovery (Lefebvre, 1991). Educators and activists with a global orientation (pursuing sustainability on a planetary scale and as a planetary challenge) often end up feeling overwhelmed, ineffective or hopeless (Greenfield, 2024) and we frequently hear people say things like 'we can't do anything – the problems are too vast, the forces arrayed against sustainability are too strong'.

We also know social space is racialised, gendered and classed in highly complex ways (Bresnihan & Millner, 2023; Fraser, 2022; Gilroy, 1995; Mbembe, 2019). These make 'reading' and rediscovering space and place pedagogically and politically very demanding. There are no easy or even clear routes towards sustainability of the sort suggested the old slogan 'think globally, act locally' and grasping the layered and dynamic nature of contemporary spatiality requires new concepts and practice (Appardurai, 2013). The precise terms on which we imagine and invite others into the rediscovery of place, and the way we think across the natural and social dimensions of space, are very important. Over the past decade we have witnessed the rapid growth of ethnonationalism and nativism rooted in a defensive, bounded, racialised conception of the nation state and geopolitics (Mudde, 2019; Renton, 2019; Toscano, 2023) alongside the resurgence of ecofascism (Roberts & Moore, 2021; see also Biehl & Staudenmeier, 1995). Ecofascism has a particular conception, or better myth, of how place, culture and ecology are, and should, be linked which seeks out sustainability for the 'pure' and natural against the underserving 'Others'. Given what we already know about the effects of breaking planetary boundaries on migration patterns, security and food production we

should take the likelihood of the threat of ecofascism, based in part on a type of excluding rediscovery of place, very seriously indeed.

For all these reasons we need to think carefully about how ecological and social sustainability are viewed in relation to each other and how this links to place-based learning and adult education. This demands field research, pedagogical experiment and the honing of theoretical tools which allow us to grasp how space is currently produced (Lefebvre, 1991; Löw, 2016), how place is experienced and how this relates to various forms of agency (Scott, 1990) as well as profound and even despair inducing heteronomy. Following Massey (1991, p. 24), we therefore want to ask: 'Is it not possible for a sense of place to be progressive; not self-closing and defensive, but outward-looking?'. What might a progressive reenvisaging of place related to ecology entail? This, we think, entails acknowledging the complexity of the production of space on various levels (Lefebvre, 1991; Löw, 2016) across a global system and how this relates to sustainability in specific places. One can point to large scale collective efforts to rethink place, space and sustainability in the Zapatista communities in Chiapas (Maison, 2023) or in parts of Rojava (Dirik, 2022) but we think due attention also needs to be given to how this plays out in less visible and smaller scale ways.

Accordingly, with this thematic issue, we aimed to put a particular emphasis on bottom-up practices that arise in concrete places. Such practices pose their 'own' issues of sustainability and allow the inhabitants of these places to take care of these concrete places and all living beings that are present in those places (such as a shoreline, a brownfield, a park, etc.). Secondly, a growing number of researchers points at the specific abilities that people (re)acquire in these practices. The responses that emerge in these place-based practices are neither instrumental (with a focus on the question 'how to fix this problem') nor simply emancipatory in the traditional sense (with a focus on the question: Who am I, and who do I need to be(come)?). Instead, they propel humans into an attentive care for the many relationships and dependencies (social, material, spatial) in that place. Education in these place-engaged practices points then to the triple capacity of becoming sensitive to the heterogeneity of human and non-human entanglements, of becoming able to slow down one's habits of orientation and of engaging oneself to formulate propositions about what living in these places need in order to thrive and prosper (Decuypere et al., 2019). This care and attention do not stop only with one's own place but also encourage a broader concern for the world. As Cameron (2003, p. 193) puts it, 'experiencing a deeper relationship with one place opens one up to a deeper affiliation with all places, rather than an exclusive sense of place'.

The articles in the Special Issue

We had an excellent response to the Call for Papers, and the seven selected papers for the Special Issue extend and refine ALE scholarship on sustainability, space and place in richly diverse ways. The authors explore the spatial dimension of sustainability education with adults in terms of ways of being and seeing, social and educational policy, learning theory, curriculum design, pedagogy and place-based methods of learning and deliberation.

The issue opens with Elizabeth A. Lange's 'Composting modernity: Pedagogical practices for emplacing ourselves within the living world' is an essay which draws on several decades of research and thinking about issues of sustainability. The article is above all an invitation to think relationally about we are enmeshed in webs of being. Building upon, and moving beyond, her earlier engagement with transformative learning and critical pedagogy Lange draws on research on ecology and sustainability, most

notably post humanist thinking and indigenous philosophies, to outline a critique of modernist conception of progress, development and place. For Lange, place is 'one of 'deep habitation' which includes ancestors and landscapes over the 'longue durée' which decentres an individualistic and anthropocentric idea of place. This, she argues, is a necessary response to the profound ecological crisis we are in. Central to this is an ethic of reciprocity, care and responsibility and cultural and political effort to decolonise ourselves of modernist assumptions. Lange argues: 'Only by withdrawing our energy from this constellation of separation ideas, both at the individual and collective levels, then breaking down these beliefs, can we begin to repattern ourselves and our communities for a life-giving future' as relational beings. Part of this is to learn to accept chaos and unknowing, to 'stay with the trouble' as Haraway (2016) puts it. Here she turns to the metaphor of composting: of the acceptance of decay, disintegration and the unfolding of time. Lange's essay is a rich, theoretically informed piece which invites a rethinking, perhaps even composting, of the still widespread, and perhaps predominant, assumptions about progress, development and knowledge in ALE Lange integrates this in a short but very suggestive discussion of pedagogy and practice which is rooted in what we might call, pace Gramsci (1994) the 'good sense' of adult education rearticulated within a relational post-humanist account of learning which draws on deep ecology, spirituality and indigenous knowledge.

The second piece is entitled 'Liberalism all the way down? Multilevel discourse analysis of adult education for sustainable development policies' and is written by Tadej Košmerl. Košmerl is interested in the way policy discourses intersect and develop in a multiscalar way. Specifically, he looks at how global and EU policies on sustainable development (SD) and education for sustainable development (ESD) relate to and delimit national policies in Slovenia. Using critical discourse analysis and the work of Andreotti et al. (2016), on liberal, neoliberal and critical discursive orientations and their interfaces in policy, Košmerl offers illuminating maps of contemporary policy making. Working through the global, EU and national policy levels Košmerl discerns a strong critical orientation in global policy and some national policies but an orientation to neoliberal and liberal ideas in EU policy. Košmerl concludes that there is evidence of a:

> significant influence from higher-level policies is evident in the Slovenian ALE SD policies – initially from the global level with the SDGs but even more so from the EU level, which also provides a vital part of the funding for adult education in Slovenia. The overarching AESD directions are, hence, formulated at the global level but are concretised at the national level primarily through the EU's strategic frameworks and financial mechanism.

Further, the EU 'extensively exploits the SDGs to legitimise and promote the neoliberal objectives of its ALE policy' and this orientation has become more noticeable in recent years at a national level in Slovenia . What is especially striking in his conclusions is the tendency in SD and ESD policy to allow some space for the discourse and rhetoric of meaningful change within overall policy logics and institutional structures and logic which makes such change unlikely or even impossible.

The paper 'The climate crisis as an impetus for learning: Approaching environmental education from learners' perspectives' by Maria Stimm and Jörg Dinkelaker shifts the focus from the roles and impacts of educators and facilitators to the individual learner's perspective and to the question, in what ways tackling with the issue of the climate crisis in the broader social context could serve as an impetus for learning. They note the tendency in discussions on sustainability and education to begin with macro accounts of the general social need learning for sustainability and a focus on what *should* be taught as a consequence. Drawing on different strands of learning theory, the authors discuss

three approaches and their explanatory value for recognizing learners as active agents of their learning processes and, thus, for understanding the diverse sources for the genesis of such impetuses. What is especially interesting in this treatment of learning theory is the presentation of established and new ideas from the German context. The way theory 'travels' or not across various contexts is an important question and the article will enrich Anglophone readers understanding of German learning theory. In a second step, the authors present empirical examples that align with usual social contexts for environmental education in its broadest sense of learning pathways and suggest a conceptual distinction: Guides and self-improvement books as a potential impetus for individual learning, social movements as a mode for collective self-pedagogisation, and, finally, the role of institutions and organizations in challenging, more or less decisively, individuals to encounter with the objectives and the learning agenda of the climate crisis. By this, Stimm and Dinkelaker provide an analytical framework for further discussions on the relation between adult learning and the issue of the climate crisis, viewed through the perspective of adult learners and possible avenues into entering a learning activity.

Diana Holmqvist and Filippa Millenberg authored 'Carving space to learn for sustainable futures: A theory-informed adult education approach to teaching'. By this, the authors draw our attention to the unsustainability of social acceleration, drawing on Rosa's (2015) critical theory and art-based pedagogies as a point of departure for discussing the vital role of educators and facilitators in providing approaches for teaching and learning that cultivate 'a sense of embeddedness in place and connection to oneself, others and the natural world'. They say 'we view places not just as physical locations but profound centres of experience that shape our understanding of ourselves. Our identities and possibilities are intertwined with the places we occupy'. This has spatial and temporal dimensions and calls educators and facilitators to slow themselves down, situate themselves in space and place and carve slowly, but deliberatively their work and use such an approach for a teaching design in the context of sustainability and for teaching for sustainable futures. This teaching design – what they call a 'seed package', introduced in this contribution, allows not only 'educators to gauge the complexity of teaching and make deliberate choices', but also offer suggestions of how theory and practice can be approached to 'emancipate students to critical awareness and engaged citizenship'.

In her article, Astrid von Kotze is prompted by the following common wisdom, as articulated by Mol (2021). As we taste, chew, swallow, digest and excrete, food not only transforms the people who ingest it, but how we grow and prepare this food also determines how we as humans can live together here in this world. Astrid von Kotze titled her article 'The gut as teacher: Learning from our bodies'. The article is a plea for a pedagogy that makes people think about what they know in an embodied sense about what and how they eat and how their daily struggle to put enough and healthy food on the table is part of powerful and unsustainable mechanism in this world. As both practitioner and researcher, von Kotze and her colleagues have been involved in various education programmes on nutrition and health with mainly working-class women and have experienced the importance of paying attention to participants' gut feelings when trying to encourage critical reflection and change. In the first part of her paper and also in the concluding sections, von Kotze connects her 'gut pedagogy' with a rich set of thinkers who each in their own way show how the separation of different sources and types of knowledge is an artificial construction that denies the forces of body and life. In contrast, a 'gut pedagogy' encourages a more lived-in and mindful engagement with our bodies in very different ways and shows how gut health is linked to food systems, inequality and environmental issues. In the case presented in this paper von Kotze explores the application of 'gut pedagogy' in a skills-training course for unemployed working-class

people in Cape Town. The program, hosted by The Women's Circle, emphasized cooperative learning, using body metaphors like the gut to highlight social, economic, and political interconnections. Sessions incorporated interactive and reflective exercises, such as 'reading the world' through mind-maps and storytelling, to promote understanding of power dynamics. 'The gut as teacher' demonstrates how our digestive system reflects deeper entanglements between humans, nature, and socio-economic systems. By examining the gut's role in digestion, participants in a course can learn how interconnected bodily systems mirror larger ecological and social structures. This pedagogy is a fascinating synthesis of popular education work – which von Kotze has been engaged in for decades – and feminist ecology.

In her article 'Exploring lost spaces: Integrating place, arts, and adult education' Maja Maksimović makes a plea for collaborative projects between art and science in what she calls 'lost places'. These are places where restorative actions are needed because of the destructive exploitation of resources in these places and where values, such as collectivism and social justice, have to be practiced anew in these places. She asks 'is it possible to cultivate fields of care and take action without an attachment to place'? Maksimović comments on a most fascinating case in the Kolubara Mining Basin, near Belgrade. The integration of a science-artistic research project in this mining area effectively visualises the tension between resource extraction and environmental degradation, while also highlighting the larger socio-political dynamics at play. What this project, unexpectedly, reveals are the many layers of history in place and the imagination that have influenced the land's management in this area. The place has been made and remade physically and imaginatively through time – in this case from Yugoslavia to independent Serbia – and these residues remain. In a walking practice artists, researchers and citizens are able to sense how the materiality of the landscape and its cycles are closely linked to social structures and ideology. Drawing on situationist and feminist ideas the article discusses the value of wandering and play. With her article the author also convincingly shows how ALE research is in need of a place-engaged way of thinking in relation to, for example, 'the insideness of place', 'the epistemic value of a place', 'the ontology of what has been lost' etc. For Maksimović, adult educators and the educational imagination they seek to foster is still overly conditioned by temporal metaphors in for example how they conceptualize emancipation or in the way they strive for radical transformation and better futures. Her article sets the stage for how arts education can embed adult education in places and in doing so, contribute to practices that encourage citizens to face losses and create space for the regeneration of places.

In the contribution on 'Walk-centric deliberations: Connecting space, place, and learning', Rolf Ahlrichs and Peter Ehrström have chosen to discuss teaching and learning methods in higher education as entry point for combining the topics of democracy, social sustainability and adult learning. Arguing from the angle of theoretical work on participatory democracy and the question of what kind of methods promote democratic practices and social sustainability, the authors align with walk-centric methods that combine deliberation and learning, following the understanding that learning is strengthened by in-situ observations of situations and places. As such the article brings us back to possibilities and limits of the existing public sphere. For this, they present three case studies that showcase not only the implementation of walk-centric methods at different higher education study places in Germany, but they also suggest a ladder model of walk-centric and walk-inclusive methods. This contributes to distinguish such approaches in their theoretical elements, but also in their didactical features and practical requirements. However, their common ground points to the relevance of recognizing the public sphere as crucial place and space for negotiating the features of sustainable

communities and democracies by raising voices, revealing concerns and articulating interests of those community members who are often unheard or overlooked.

We have also included an open paper in this Special Issue on 'Studying the legacy of second-chance adult education in Flanders: the regional university and the professionalization of adult educators'. In this paper, Joke Vandenabeele describes how she teaches an adult education course at the University of Leuven (Belgium). Every year, third-year bachelor students participating in this adult education course interview adult educators working within a particular adult education setting, such as integration courses, detention education, second-chance education etc. The analysis in this paper shows how such an study exercise can make the university (again) a place where the daily professional practice of adult educators, i.e. their ambitions and doubts, ambiguities and contradictions, can be fully materialize as collective study material.

In our call to this Special Issue we wrote that an enormous amount of work needs to be done, both empirically and theoretically, if adult education research and adult education practices want to play a significant role in a learning how to re-inhabit the places where people live and work. All this raises important research issues to which this Special Issue has taken an important step. The methodological choices and framing of the topic by the authors in this Special issue is interesting. There are no empiricist, small to medium scale evidence based studies (one of the most common type of research articles in ALE and education journals). There are two theoretical articles, a piece of discourse analysis and four articles which intentionally blur the line between researching and designing educational practices. There is a notable interest in art-based and innovative methods here as well. What this shows is an important strength of ALE research and practices: the understanding that learning-teaching-processes on sustainability with adults necessarily embrace cognitive, content-related, corporal, societal, sensitive and also spiritual dimensions. Accordingly, this puts once more attention to the relevance of supporting participatory and bottom-up-practices of adult education on sustainability issues at concrete places in the world. Seen in this way, an important challenge for ALE practices is less about teaching adults how to establish a new kind of fit in their struggle with their environment but more about designing and curating an encounter that involve humans in an ongoing fine-tuning process with a world populated by many more beings than just humans.

Theoretically, several of the authors in this Special Issue look to post-colonial ideas to rethink place and sustainability and problematizes methodological nationalism. It is pertinent to say that the contributors are based in very different countries, namely Slovenia, Serbia, Finland, Germany, Sweden, Canada and South Africa. To return to the observations made earlier about the existing clusters of ALE research it is worth noting that critical pedagogy and critical theory are prominent in the contributions – Negt, hooks, Freire, Rosa, all feature – but transformative learning is less prominent. Interestingly, none of the articles place Bourdieu and Foucault – who has been so influential scholarship on space and power in the social science and who have been so frequently cited in adult education (Nylander & Fejes, 2019) – centre stage. The authors do not look to social geography or anthropology either. But the influence of a post-structuralist inflected feminism is strong. Connected to this the ethics of care and a holistic embodied notion of learning run as a golden thread through most of the articles. This sets the ground for a more elastic reading of space; not only as social or conceptual but also as material and physical. What this adds to the well-established strands of research in adult education is how humans are not in some sort of leading position towards more sustainable ways of living. Instead the focus of the researcher shifts to a learning process that puts concern for the essential heterogeneity of the more-than-human world at the center and to how

issues on what is human and what is non-human, what is global and what is local, what is situated here and what is situated there, what is near and what is far, what is powerful and what is excluded, fold into the specific spatio-temporal design of adult education practices.

Notes

¹   Freire has also been critiqued for his putatively 'modernist' perspective (Bowers & Apffel-Margin, 2005).

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Composting modernity: Pedagogical practices for emplacing ourselves within the living world

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Abstract

We have reached the logical end of modernity as it lays waste to the natural world, discards people, and reveals its inherent and thus continual violence. Withdrawing our energy from and breaking down the constellation of modern beliefs, we can repattern ourselves and our communities for a life-giving future. In its structure and content, this article demonstrates a relationality approach to sustainability and climate education that undertakes practices to emplace humans back within the living world. Indigenous philosophies of place as well as posthumanism offer relational notions of time, space, place, and land to consider. Pedagogy-rich, the article provides practices for: restoring the history of modernity as a decolonial counternarrative; composting the most problematic beliefs and practices of modernity; providing tracings of and for possible futures; deriving pedagogical entry points of relevance to learners; and nurturing ways of being that can build a rooted, more life-giving way of being.

Keywords: relationality, emplacing/emplacement, kinship practices, composting modernity

Introduction

We have reached the logical end of modernity as it lays waste to the natural world, discards people, and reveals its inherent and thus continual violence. Withdrawing our energy from and breaking down the constellation of modern beliefs, we can repattern ourselves and our communities for a life-giving future. As many old stories are losing their hold, new stories are emerging including the new story of relationality. It can assist by repatterning our view of reality, our ethical and energetic integration in the web of life, and therefore emplacing humans back into the living world.

As Vanessa Machado de Oliveira (2021) describes, 'modernity is a single story of progress, development, human evolution, and civilization that is omnipresent' (p. xxi). It is hard to imagine beyond, despite our existential angst. Within modernity, capitalism has been growth-oriented and yet crisis-prone, using geographic expansion to address its cyclical crises, or what David Harvey (1996) calls its 'spatial fix' (p. 295). As it moves, colonial and now late neocolonial capitalism reconfigures space, time, and place, producing what philosopher Whitehead calls '"permanences" – relatively stable configurations of matter and things' (Harvey, 1996, p. 55). Our world of these permanences, including institutions, socio-cultural relations, and economic practices as well as physical and biological attributes, is a taken-for-granted prospect. They 'occupy a piece of space in an exclusive way (for a time) and thereby define a place – their place – (for a time). The process of place formation is a process of carving out "permanences" from the flow of processes creating spaces' (Harvey, 1996, p. 261).

Though modernism appears solid and permanent, it is reaching its logical end and, as de Oliveira says, requires a letting go. 'What if' we imagined and practiced our relations to space, time, and place differently? Would this open up more possibilities? This paper moves out of a relational and dialectical conception of space, time, and environment that is common among many nonwestern knowledge systems as well as deeper understandings of premodern ways of knowing (Harvey, 1996). I wish to demonstrate a relationality way of being that can inform the pedagogical entry points and learning engagements of educators, whether in formal classrooms or communities. Relationality here is a philosophical approach that understands that entities, time and space only exist in relation, rather than independently as Newton proposed. It is the relations 'between' that define entities, time, space, and place.

Relationality practices can help us move past the instrumentalist thinking which often unknowingly shapes our pedagogical practices, even in sustainability and especially climate education with our deadline anxieties. Relationality practices, often related through story, can assist in sinking deeper into our places and becoming kin, profiling the losses, alienations, and superficialities of the Modern era. A relationality ontology can help us compost the aspects of modernity that feed the dynamics threatening all life on Earth. Through composting, we allow for aspects of these permanences to breakdown and recycle them into new potentialities that can constitute breakthrough, as in the emergence model of social change. Composting can also provide renewed soil ready to receive the tender seeds of a life-giving way of being.

This article is to be read experientially. Throughout the article, I engage in storytelling of my embedded, embodied, and emplaced relational practices while reflecting on meanings of place. Following the decolonial teachings of my Indigenous teachers, I begin with a gratitude practice then a practice of naming our place and kin as a contrary stance to the modern world. It is an understanding that all our relations keep us alive and define us. Naming our historical moment and our Great Work as educators and learners within this moment is vital for positioning ourselves in time and space. I then counterpose the narrative of modernity and its historical development as our old story, with relationality as an emerging story. To aid the process of letting go and transitioning, reflections on the alchemy of composting, specifically composting modernity, will challenge conventional notions of social change. I summarize these practices and reflections as pedagogical practices that can emplace us back into our living relations. In sum, the article offers a bottom-up practice that can rebuild a sense of place and reinscribe the notion of limits, to counter the conditioning of modernity.

A gratitude practice

On this day, as most days, I give thanks to the four elements that keep us all alive: Earth, Water, Air, and Fire. Each element refers in part to the networked systems of Earth – the biosphere, the hydrosphere, the atmosphere, and the geosphere – as well as the systems and elements of the cosmos. Each element, personified here, works with the others to permit life on this planet.

I give thanks to *Sun*, as He climbs higher in the sky and gains warmth every day, heralding the onset of spring and a new growing season here in the Northern Hemisphere. His *Fire* enables all life on Earth to survive.

I give thanks to *Moon*, as She watches over the movement of *Water*, in the oceans which have been the mysterious womb from which all life has come, the movement of water in plants and growth in the dark, and in our bodies. I thank all the fresh-water holders – the creeks, lakes, rivers, and wetlands – who like veins and arteries of Mother Earth share fresh water with all of us who require this living substance.

I give thanks to *Earth*, as She has always provided a home with specific places for us and many other beings to live out our lives. The intricacy of all Earth systems and the web of life with its vitality, abundance, and persistence helps keep us embodied human ones alive.

I give thanks to the four winds that create the constantly swirling weather systems that refresh the air, land, and water. The movement of *Air* is the energy that creates a dynamic balancing among all forces and elements.

All of us live under the same sky. All of us are bound together by these elements, the planets, and the web of life. May we dedicate what we do, today and every day, to Life[1] itself.

Naming our place and kin

> *We can no longer write or speak from nowhere to abstract audiences.*
> (Esteva & Prakash, 1998, p. 7)

I am Elizabeth A Lange. My life matrix includes my Eastern Germanic ancestors, their wanderings, and migrations to find a place that was not filled with violence, dispossession, and oppression. By the early 20th century just before the world wars, they left behind tragic memories but also their prosperous yet threatened farming communities. They found their way from Europe to what is now Canada and Treaty Six land, the traditional home of the Plains Cree, where the grassland plains and boreal forest converge into the Aspen Parkland, extending into the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.

Therefore, I *am* the water of the Columbia Icefields which descends from the glaciers onto the prairies, slaking my thirst, swelling our gardens, and cleansing me. I *am* the soils that feed me, fertile black loam, some of the finest in the world. I *am* the oxygen of the boreal forest and aspen parkland that inflates my lungs. This is not metaphorical, it is biological. The whispering of the aspen leaves in the wind, who also caresses the fields of grain and furiously drives the snow, vibrates my cells. For most of my life, I lived in the energetic vibrational field of the prairies, most often nuanced and understated.

I grew up in a small, flat city[2], but we visited my grandparents and other relatives 'on the farm' every weekend, where my grandparents originally settled. My Dad, who loved the land, taught me tree, bird and animal identification and behaviours, the crops our family grew including their indicators of health, as well as cloud formations for predicting weather. As a young child, our family engaged in regular gathering activities

like berry picking or fishing. We ate our produce and meat from what we or our relatives produced or garnered. In these ways, I came to understand the land that fed my people and the community values of their farming communities. I was held by a loving family as well as a cultural and religious community, providing a strong reference point for my sense of self and a place-based identity.

It has taken almost a lifetime to understand this gift, as well as to integrate progressively larger understandings of this place. I came to understand a continuity, that I come from a People, and despite moving, my Peoples have lived in similar ecological habitats. They were indigenous to the Northern European plain between two key rivers, moving to the Eastern European Plain, and then to the Canadian Plain. I understand now that we are Plains people. All these plains burgeoned with forests as well as grasslands, partly bounded by mountains and often threaded by a glacial river. The birds that greeted my ancestors each day, the stars which held their dreams and longings, the darkened silhouettes that comforted them each evening, the movements of the deer and other mammals that they relied on, the trees that sheltered and warmed them, the animal and plant cycles that oriented their seasonal activities, the songs and stories that held their relationship to place, all formed part of our identity.

So, my meaning of 'place' is one of deep habitation (Orr, 1992). Indigenous people say deep habitation can be ancestral, where the knowledge and consciousness arise locally and in association with the long-term occupancy of a place. Deep habitation can also come from growing deep roots – where one understands the geological history, can trace physical details from loving memory, witnesses the relative health over time, where one has an intimacy of connection to the beings there, a sense of personhood linked to that place, and where you bear the marks of that place on your body.

Thus, being 'em-placed' implies intimacy with a physical place. 'We are not only *in* places, but *of* them,' part of the web of kinship in a particular locale (Casey, 1996 as cited in Styres, 2019, p. 27). Although one can become emplaced over a lifetime, it is more often intergenerational – knowledge passed down but also memory that is carried in the blood or rather, DNA (Weber-Pillwax, 2021). One layered understanding of place, then, is as encultured and embodied, as part of dynamic relationing. As the New Science suggests, this relationing has an energy field that creates specific patterns of organizing which underlie what appears as objects, features, and beings in that field (Capra & Luisi, 2014).

Inherent in emplacement are the ethics of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility. As Karen Barad (2007) describes, ethico-onto-epistem-ology is the 'study of practices of knowing in being' appreciating the 'intertwining of ethics, knowing, and being' (p. 185). For instance, I always felt a sacredness in the land, partly from the reverence with which my grandparents regarded it, as they often suffered privation to make a life in relation to the land, and partly from the energy and old wisdom that was embedded in the Land and among the Indigenous peoples who had stewarded it for 12,000 years. I have been privileged to reside in this place, even as I struggle with my history as a settler and their reinscriptions of this space, and as I continue to seek out my older ancestral history on another continent.

I am even more deeply privileged by my Cree friends and scholars, in their generosity, who have been teaching me about the land, the plants, and their traditional practices and ceremonies which have honoured this place for millennia. In their Earth-honouring ways where they understand 'we are all related' (Cajete, 2000, p. 178), Land is the place that holds a People, including the bones of the ancestors, stories, and wisdom. Land is a Teacher, *if* we enter into respectful and receptive relations. Land, Country, or Territory is typically capitalized as it is understood as both sacred and a living entity that

constantly speaks (Styres, 2019). Yunkaporta (2019) summarizes that one, in part, needs to sink into 'Indigenous pattern-thinking, connective thinking' (p. 19) to emerge into 'a different way of being in space, place, and Land' (Lange, 2023, p. 378). In this way, they say, Land *claims us*. Land and kin are animate, responsive. Once part of us, this embodied relationing remains, however muted. Disrupting this relationing was the goal of colonisation, who inscribed place with their own categories and perceptions, attempting to erase place-based identities in favour of mobility, urbanisation, and cultural homogenization, forcibly if necessary.

Indigenous people say settlers came to the Americas wanting land. This is true of my people who were trying to escape feudal landholding relationships, religious war, and ethnic discrimination. They were implicated in the colonizing dynamics of clearing the plains of the buffalo and by extension Indigenous people, prior to their settlement (Daschuk, 2013). They believed the ideology of *terra nullius*, that the land was empty, 'empty space,' even though they had trade relationships with Indigenous people and witnessed the seasonal mobility of their habitation, a deliberate blindness given the fixity of a private property perspective. As much as possible, the plains had been deliberately *emptied* by the European colonizers for their reinscriptions. My ancestors were implicated by purchasing, fencing, clearing, and working land that was stolen through the legal machinations establishing private ownership. They were part of the degrading racism and blindness that attempted to legitimate this theft of not only land and lives, as genocide, but of knowledge, as epistemicide. So, although we came to love this land and grow roots here, this is the underlying nefarious history and pain embedded in this place which I face in every interaction with Indigenous friends and colleagues.

Yet, together as Indigenous and nonindigenous, we are decolonizing our minds and bodies while engaging in a national reconciliation process that acknowledges the violent colonial history that preceded us. Nevertheless, Indigenous people still live this violence every day. It is my responsibility to remember all this. It is my responsibility to try to understand who my own people were before they themselves were colonized by the Roman empire and Christianity. It is my task to be a Rememberer regarding both continents. It is my responsibility not only to remember and learn from the past but to also look forward, participating in creating a different way of being that revalues place-based habitation.

Naming our moment

Now, we are in the midst of a *Great Epochal Shift*, that is not only civilizational but geological. In this regard, Earth is our place, a single planetary system, an insight from Gaia theory.

We have resided for the past 10,000 years in the Holocene period, a geological period in which Earth's conditions have been unusually stable. However, human activities over the past thousand years, intensifying in the last several hundred years, are now pushing the planetary living systems outside their safe and stable operating zone into the zone of risk. Some consider this a transition to the Anthropocene Era where humans are changing the very composition and functioning of the planet (Folke, 2013). With the new update from the Stockholm Resilience Centre (2023) (see *Figure 1*), human activities have now pushed six of the nine living systems past the planetary boundaries into the zone of risk. The irony of our science capabilities is that we are detailing the slow and persistent degradation of the planet's systems before our eyes, the 'long emergency' (Kunstler, 2005).

Only one of these planetary boundaries is *climate change*, where global warming is at 1.18° above pre-industrial levels (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2023), inching closer to the 1.5°. We already see the compounding and accelerated impacts, considered a Code Red alert for humanity (United Nations [UN], 2021; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2023b). Other boundaries include *biodiversity loss* where most species are declining at rates unprecedented in history (UN, 2019), now called the sixth extinction (Kolbert, 2014), which is the largest loss of life since the dinosaurs (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2022; 2023). This has occurred in part because of profound *land use changes*, mainly the conversion of wildland to agricultural use for feeding ever growing numbers of humans. Changes in *freshwater use* is now changing the very water cycle. *Biochemical flows* of nitrogen and phosphorous, mainly from fertilizers, have significantly polluted the Earth's air and water. *Ocean acidification*, mainly from the carbon absorbed by the ocean, is changing the very chemistry and temperature of the ocean, threatening the lives therein. *Aerosol particles* in the atmosphere are changing water cycles and cloud formation. One piece of good news about what concerted global action can accomplish is that *ozone depletion* has been reversed since the Montreal Protocol in 1987. Finally, the introduction of human made materials, *novel entities*, particularly plastics, are interfering with natural processes and adding to levels of pollution. In sum, given the modern way of life, particularly in the West but exported globally, eight billion of us have become a biophysical force that is changing the context of life on Earth (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2013).

Figure 1. The 2023 update to the Planetary boundaries. Source: *Azote for Stockholm Resilience Centre*, based on analysis in Richardson et al. (2023). CC BY-NC-ND 3.0
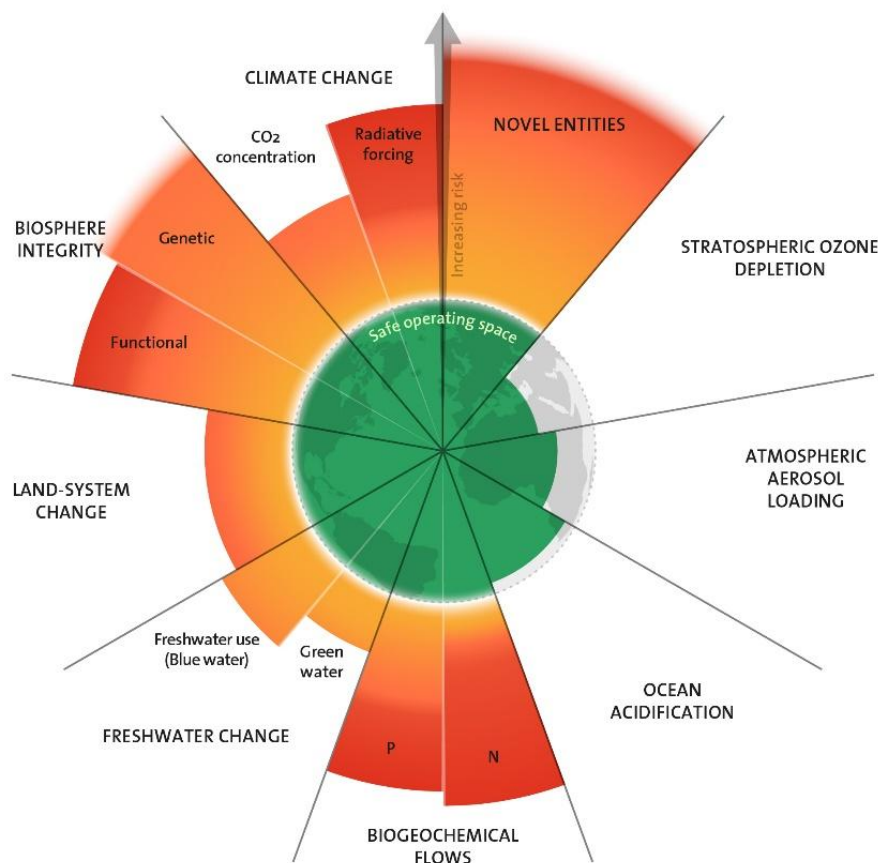
Our great work

Thus, this decade up to 2030 is considered a decisive decade (IPCC, 2023a). Together, climate change and biodiversity loss are the two critical and intersecting boundaries requiring significant global effort. For instance, the UN initiative known as 30X30 by 2030, aims to place 30% of both the planet's land and waters under protection by 2030 (UNEP, 2022). Reaching net zero carbon by 2040 is another initiative critical to planetary life (United Nations Climate Change Coalition, 2023). Such global initiatives are crucial for ameliorating the damages of overshooting these boundaries. These damages hit hardest the most vulnerable among us as intensification of fire, wind, and water events shrink areas of habitability and access to food and water, creating refugees from climate hot spots (United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees [UNHCR], 2023a; 2023b).

Educators are pivotal to reaching these shared goals to mitigate the worst impacts but also anticipating possible futures. Many educators are part of the global movement helping to build sustainable and regenerative cultures. Sustainability refers to the practices that can sustain Life indefinitely, by respecting, honouring, and cooperating within the processes of our living planet (Lange, 2023, p. 1). Regenerative cultures are those that 'put life at the centre of every action and decision' (Hawken, 2021, p. 9), especially prioritizing the living world over the desired profits and power of extractivist industrialism which simply removes 'resources' for export and processing while sacrificing the living world. Regenerative practices heals these severed relations between humans and between humans and the living world.

Undertaking this work as educators can be understood as our Great Work, defined by Thomas Berry as connecting our work to the fate of the human species as well as the history and dynamics of the Earth and the cosmos (Berry, 1999). We can dedicate our educational work toward healing from modernity while practicing hope, 'not avoiding grief, anxiety and rage' (Lange, 2023, p. 2) but taking certain actions because they are the right thing to do, regardless of how it turns out (Havel, 1991 as cited in Lange, 2023, p. 2): '[T]he planet will survive in some form – that *does* offer hope. Life is persistent'. We take certain actions as anticipatory of a world for which we hope. In this way, educators can be midwives for this Great Transformation, in the hopes that the possibilities for a more life-giving epoch will emerge more definitely.

The old story: Modernity as separation

At a deep level, modernity is separation. It has involved multiple separations: from the body, from emotion, from wisdom and creativity, from each other and skillful means to live as vibrant communities, from place, from the living world, from a creative and active cosmos, and from complex and nuanced understandings of place (Spretnak, 1999).

As David Orr (1992) explains, modern people are 'deplaced people for whom our immediate places are no longer sources of food, water, livelihood, energy, materials, friends, recreation, or sacred inspiration' (Orr, 1992, p. 126). We are 'nowhere people' who no longer know the 'art of dwelling' or 'living well in a place' (Orr, 1992, p. 130, 126). As part of this, Gruenewald[3] (2008) suggests that even place-based education is sometimes hesitant to link ecological themes with critical themes related to the oppressions and repressions of global capitalism. Yet, relationality approaches can integrate cultural decolonization with ecological re-inhabitation.

Many scholars now are engaged in a deep questioning of the fundamental assumptions that emerged over the development of the Wests and modernity, as follows.

- According to Riane Eisler (1987), the Indo-European horse-riding pastoralists and warrior nomads of the Eurasian steppe who idolized 'the lethal power of the blade' (Gimbutas, 1977 as cited in Eisler, 1987, p. xvii) overcame peaceful and prosperous cultures who worshipped a female Deity. From the 5th to 3rd centuries BCE (Eisler, 1987, p. 44), they brought with them violence, war and conquest, technologies of destruction, domination and authoritarianism, stratification and hierarchy, male Gods, male-rule/patriarchy, and the values of sacrifice and heroism into the culture of the West. This model Eisler calls 'the dominator model of social organization' (p. 45).

- The Classical empires of Greece, Rome, and the Holy Roman (Christian) empire solidified extensive militarism, invasion, conquering through subordination, imperialism, and human dominion over the living world.

- The early modernism of the Renaissance, building from classical thought, heralding rationalism, humanism, individualism, and dualism.

- The Scientific revolution brought a clockwork universe, the scientific method and desire for certainty and universality, a notion of freedom as release from the Earth's shackles, Earth as dead matter, universal and secular reason, and matter as ultimately reconstructible, all aspects of an extremely narrow and blind form of knowledge (Morin, 2008).

- The colonial era was the spread of violence and death through its: collision with and destruction of other worldviews and knowledges; the genocide, trafficking, and slavery of millions of people considered uncivilized or less than human; the rapacious use of labour, land, and resources; and the beginnings of ecocide through extinctions beginning in the 1700s (Ghosh, 2021; Pascoe, 2014).

- The Enlightenment then the French and American political revolutions bringing ideas of: representative democracy (first estate of clergy, second estate of nobility, third estate of the common people; and later the fourth estate of the press); private property; the nation-state as a social contract; republican democracy, parliamentary democracy, and constitutional monarchy with their governmental structures of checks and balances; political parties and ideologies; liberal human rights and the role of individual conscience; and social welfare states, all eclipsing the world of divine right monarchy, feudalism, religious obedience, and church delivery of social and educational services, to which some leaders now wish to return us.

- High modernism with the Industrial revolution then the Gilded Age, facilitating a capitalist economic revolution through new technology powered by water, coal, then oil and gas. It perpetuated: a machine view of life; industrial extractivism; social and economic progress through heightened productivity and profit; an socio-economic organization based on meritocracy and social mobility; the enclosure movement with ongoing worker displacements and need for labour mobility; waged jobs and the need for mass schooling; and social welfare to attenuate consequences for those who fall on hard times or with extenuating circumstances…all undergirded by the ideology of progress understood as the economic model of unlimited growth.

- Late modernism has been over a century of constant crises: including economic and financial boom and bust cycles as well as political ideological posturing, invasion, and war, with attempted amelioration through international development programs. Social movements expanded, including: worker's rights and the backlashes, civil rights and its backlashes, the broadening gender and sexuality spectrums and backlashes; the peace movement (anti-war and anti-

nuclear) in the face of the military industrial complex and its need for war; and the coalescing of environmental and climate issues with backlashes; the contention against the 'Establishment' and its bureaucratic ponderance and consolidation of elite power. Neoliberal economic globalization and disaster capitalism followed, designed for additional profitmaking, continued to undermine these movements, now global in scope (Della Porta, 2007).

There is no denying that the modern era has brought increasing prosperity and technological advance, however it has been at the expense of natural world and the 'fourth world' who have consistently been regarded as the disposable ones (Stuchul et al., 2021). Taken to its logical end, modernity is inherently violent, including destroying the life base of the planet.

Many suggest that modernity is dying, having come to its logical end. Its perennial 'nowness' and promises for the future have been shown to be empty. Vanessa Machado de Oliveira[4] (2021) explains, 'Although modernity always sees itself and behaves as if "young," it has grown old and is facing its end' (p. xxii). De Oliveria describes modernity not as an 'object' or 'era' but a living entity with an energy that drives it. This energy drives our constellation of beliefs (progress, success, ownership, efficiency, autonomy, competition, power as control, comfort, order, achievement, affluence, consumption, busyness, entitlement). It revivifies modernity each day (see *Figure 2*). Modernity has deeply conditioned our thinking, values, understanding of the cosmos, our way of being in the world, and how we relate. It has penetrated our very cells, minds, bodies, and beliefs as well as our social organization and organization of our knowledge.

Figure 2. Separation Ideas. Source: (Lange, 2023)

Separation Ideas - Individual	Separation Ideas - Social
1. ownership/possession as wealth	11. progress/civilizing
2. success and achievement as "making it"	12. power as domination/ control
3. my personal good first	13. certainty/order/one truth
4. consumption/image/lifestyle = happiness	14. unlimited growth
5. competition/winning/being first, being best	15. affluence is desired standard of living
6. keeping up/anxiety of missing out/being uncool	16. rational mind is freedom/ reason as universal
7. I am entitled/deserving/ my rights/get what's mine	17. quick fixes/solution focus
8. constant doing/stay busy	18. individualism/ind. autonomy
9. being efficient/fastness	19. Learning as cognitive acquisition; head work
10. being the hero, saving the day	20. only some are deserving/ hierarchies

Only by withdrawing our energy from this constellation of separation ideas, both at the individual and collective levels, then breaking down these beliefs into usable components,

can we begin to repattern our way of thinking, our way of being as well as our communities and their practices for a life-giving future.

The alchemy of composting

This is a transition moment when we are between stories, between the old and the new which is yet unknown and unnamed, although we often see glimmers. As Bayo Akómoláfé (2022) asserts, we need to sit in this crack, fully inhabit this inbetween time. Not seeking fixes, solutions, or 'the new and improved' is part of the challenge of this time.

As de Oliveira (2021) explains, many will not yet be ready to leave the promises and comforts of modernity. Some will feel modernity has not yet fully evolved toward its promises or they still want access to its promises. Some will continue to push for reform or even radical transformation. She asserts we need to leave it behind, as part of our existential crisis. Although we will have this complex of voices within, breaking faith with modernity is the first step.

Composting is a biological and chemical process but also mythic process. Biologically, plant matter, food scraps, waste products, and other biodegradable materials are decomposed through specific physical and chemical conditions, requiring oxygen, water, and heat in the right amounts. Matter is metabolized through the bodies of organisms into primal elemental particles which are made available again as humus or soil, to support healthy plant growth.

As gardeners know, there are specific requirements for the composting process. There must be a balance between aeration and moisture and the compost pile must be big enough to create the heat needed to kill weed seeds and pathogens. It also requires billions of organisms, who we generally love to hate given our sanitization fetish, performing the digestion roles of consuming and digesting rotting materials, then excreting them as soil. The primary organisms are bacteria, fungi, snails, slugs, millipedes, mites, and nematodes. The secondary organisms are beetles, earwigs, springtails, sowbugs, centipedes, ants, flies, spiders, and worms. Many of these also perform a tertiary level of digestion before the compost is ready. Without these myriad small beings, we would be drowning in refuse.

Trash mounds or middens, the refuse of a culture, have been great delight to archeologists for their generation of knowledge about past cultures. However, in the mythic understandings of Traditional societies, decay is considered sacred and treated with great reverence. Often small shrines and temples were built by middens to offer gifts to the sacred spirits of Decay. Traditional cultures understood the vital importance of decay to the continuance of Life (Prechtel, 2012). Everything runs its course, dies, and is digested. Yet, this understanding of Life counters the modern understanding of continual linear progressive development, including the constant growth economic model. The magnitude of modern trash is testament to the loss of this teaching.

Composting modernity

Composting is a built-in revolution of ideas and practices, that can clear space for an emergence of possibilities. We may be in the early phases of a systemic collapse, with potential for breakdown or various pathways to breakthrough. Yet, this enables us to free up energy from business-as-usual and ready ourselves through a different way of being, thinking, and acting (Capra, 2024). During this time, the challenge is to sustain enough of the living systems to avoid total collapse.

The importance of compost is breaking material down into usable components, mainly energy and nutrients, thereby creating seeds for a future. The alchemy of composting regenerates the life process and feeds the next generation. Breaking down modern beliefs and practices, finding usable components and harnessing the energy, is also soil-building for a new culture. In this moment, we need to compost what no longer serves us – what is worn out, dead, broken, no longer relevant.

Interestingly, in many old cultures, people themselves were buried in mounds or deep in caves. This replicates the understanding of being placed in the stomach of the Earth who digests us into something new. So, just as we consumed during our lifetimes to live, so we must be consumed. This holds life and death in balance, rather than attempting to vanquish death as attempted by modernity. Death produces more life. If we are to experience emergence into a new era, some breakdown is necessary before breakthrough is reached (Capra, 2024).

Traditional peoples say that modern people are 'on the take' (Prechtel, 2012; Poirier, 2023). To stay alive individually and collectively, we must take from the living world. This is reality which cannot be ameliorated by veganism or any other practice to avoid killing. However, an ancient practice that responds to this necessity is to be cognizant at all times of our indebtedness to the living world, to kill honourably, and to offer our daily gratitude to the living beings and forces who keep us alive. As Poirier (2023) reminds us, 'Food is the child of all that died to make the seed and the soil that it grows in. To eat is to be re-membered by the food' (p. 198).

As moderns, we desire *acquisition* of practices without the hard learning. We feel an entitlement to 'be in the know,' demanding our teachers 'give me the answers' about meanings rather than exploring ourselves and coming to our own meanings. This is why many Indigenous people are wary of moderns. We have been conditioned to grab knowledge or goods and run, to grab the meanings and use it for our own ends. We tend not to give proper due, understand the layered, deeper meanings, or acknowledge knowledge as emplaced. We have lost a sense of limits, especially in science and technology, believing anything is possible and if we can do it, we should do it. We want knowledge and practices to be made convenient and the process expedient. We expect knowledge and knowing that are neat and tidy. Yet it is a lazy way of knowing, a process of entitlement, which stays at the most superficial level of learning. In a deeper understanding, we do not deserve anything; we are not owed anything. We are, however, a part of a much larger reality, requiring a process of re-membering.

These tendencies are deeply conditioned modern ways of being and one manifestation of the larger problem, parallel in the way our industries and institutions operate as well as how we undertake knowledge generation processes. This is why de Oliveira and Akómoláfé urge that we sit in the uncertainty, the unknowingness, the chaos of these times. Only by taking ourselves out of our comfort zones and normal processes, resisting our habitual responses and composting existing behaviours, while hearing the echoes of Traditional wisdom, will we begin to address the deepest dynamics threatening life on earth. Akómoláfé (n.d.) says, 'The times are urgent, let us slow down'. We must work with what is counterintuitive to the modern.

When we begin to ask respectfully, give gratitude for the myriad of gifts and love around us daily, when we take the time to ponder, when we sit in waiting to understand – Indigenous people have taught me – the learning shows up, sometimes in the most unexpected way. This may take years, in some cases. If you expect things to come your way, to be given things, then the learning turns away from you. If you place yourself back into the living world, with humbleness, reciprocity, carefulness, and respect, then different relationing begins to evolve.

An emerging story: Relationality as belonging

We see fleeting glimmers of a new story that is (re)emerging, not only from Indigenous cosmo-ontology, but from the New Science. Whereas Galileo and then Newton saw a clockwork universe of mechanical planetary movement, with stars and galaxies floating in black empty space, our old story, the Hubble and James Webb telescopes now illustrate the dense energetic webs that connects the stars and galaxies, changing the science story. With Einstein and other early atomic scientists, we understood reality to be comprised of atoms as the fundamental building block, but then it was found that particles can show up as either energy or matter, or both. Now, we see reality as a highly sensitive, finely woven web floating and constantly moving, through which vibrations of energy are constantly pulsing and transmitting information, impacting all things in the cosmos constantly. Basic reality is unbroken wholeness in flowing movement (Bohm, 1980). This is the science view of Relationality, leading us to a different view of reality and of social change (Spretnak, 2011; Thayer-Bacon, 2017).

We have studied the Earth in separate disciplines for centuries, following a reductionist process. Objects under the scholarly gaze were broken down into their component parts and the operation and functions of an organism or a physical reality, were explored. Now, however, in part through Gaia theory, we are beginning to see the Earth as a whole, seeing patterns and systems instead of component parts and functions. We have identified the biosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere, and geosphere as networked systems, impacting each other synergistically. All these systems are self-organizing and self-regulating to maintain the optimal conditions for life to exist, a process of continual self-creation. The Earth herself is illustrating where she is healthy and ill and how we can once again cooperate within the natural rhythms and processes.

In the old story, humans are self contained in their bodies and minds. In the resulting individualism, we understand each as pursuing their own good, their own freedoms, their own entitlements, responsible only to themselves and their conscience. Although this sense of individualism, its self-truth and its rigorous morality, was originally subsumed within the notion of an embedded social responsibility, it has become trivialized and vulgarized into self-fulfillment and even narcissistic self-absorption (Taylor, 1989, 1991). However, the new story is that we are Nested-I's (Bollier & Helfrich, 2019) or communal individuals (Gould, 1978) who are profoundly related to all that is around us. Our body boundaries are perforated as mineral and chemical elements and the energy web flow in and out of our bodies. We are made of the same elements as the universe. Our body is a living system, nested within a social system and Earth's living systems, throughout which energy travels.

In the old story, only humans learn. Animals, and those considered subhuman, do not have this capacity to learn, although behaviourism demonstrated limited learning capacity through reward and punishment processes. The new story is that every cell in every living being uses perception and cognition to maintain a state of health. Challenging the paradigm of materialism, de Quincey (2005) states, 'consciousness goes all the way down' (p. 21). Cognition IS the process of life. All of life learns. Many scientists now are demonstrating the sentience of plants, animals, and living systems such as forests as well as the responsiveness of water (Tompkins & Bird, 1973; Bekoff, 2002; Wohlleben, 2015; Emoto, 2004). Living systems are responsive and adapt to changing conditions. Over modernity, human learning has been restricted to our senses or to logic, marginalizing knowing from the body, emotion, intuition, perception, and other nonsensory capacities (de Quincey, 2005). Now, human learning can be a responsiveness to the intelligibility of the world around us.

Further, all living systems have energy fields. The energy field of forests and some of their various chemical compositions (Beresford-Kroeger, 2010) can be deeply healing, called by the Japanese, *shinrin-yoku* or forest bathing. Instead of an inert world, the world or worlding is process where things are in constant motion, pulsing with relation. The world is participative. Our hearts are the most powerful energy field in our body. We can activate these electromagnetic fields found in our places, around and in our bodies, and that which emerges from our hearts. Attunement to energy can occur in learning groups as well in ways that substantially enhance the learning process (Bache, 2008).

Finally, we have a new human story developing, in part from quantum physics that has shown that there is not just one truth but approximations. This includes recognizing that the diversity of world's spiritualities exist as the relationship between a people, a Land base, and the spirit world which exists in that place. Each group of people historically developed their own stories about the origin of the universe, the origin of humans, and the role of humans on Earth, often called the 'original instructions' (Nelson, 2008) through which spiritual teachers taught them how to live well and wisely. Although we may find personal meaning in a specific tradition, these spiritualities are all part of the larger human story, one truth among many. The old wisdom traditions carry this knowledge still and convey it through story, music, poetry, and art, pathways toward manifesting higher human qualities. As scientists have found, the paradoxes of reality often necessitate the turn toward mythological, poetic, and spiritual language. In other words, many of the resources that we require in this historical moment already exist. In this new, very old story, we have taken a very long detour through separation to arrive back at the understanding that, we belong. We *are* related to all of life.

Finding pedagogical entry points

Despite intensifying global changes related to unsustainability, attracting adults to sustainability programs has always been a challenge. How do we reach and engage learners in this kind of learning? Approaching sustainability directly is often ineffective, in part given that sustainability is not necessarily well understood by the general public, nor does it have a sense of urgency. Although climate change has urgency, engaging learners in exploring realities such as climate change, even within the context of a course, can often provoke resistance or denial, echoing broader rhetoric.

Using conventional adult education theory, it is vital to find relevant pedagogical entry points that appear to solve a pressing problem or meet an immediate need. Carrying out a formal or informal conversational or digital survey of learner needs can reveal entry points. These entry points can be either the unique lived challenges in a city or region or the questions and concerns that are uppermost in potential learner minds. Shor (1992) calls this problem-posing through *generative* issues 'found in the unsettled intersections of personal life and society' (p. 55). In this way the topics are generated through variously derived learner voices. The other two forms of problem-posing are through *topical* themes that ask an intriguing social question of current importance, or *academic* themes that ask an intriguing question from the course content and the body of knowledge from which it emerges. In all cases, the task is to build a mutual curriculum which illustrates responsiveness and relevance. Typically, once a constellation of concerns is identified for a group of learners, a pedagogy can develop from these starting points slowly connecting sustainability or climate change content as part of the fruitful responses to these felt issues and questions.

Some of these starting points are best revealed by asking seven different questions. The first two questions are about key *life challenges* and *pressing concerns* for potential

learners, which may be anything from stress, rising cost of living, access to food and water, balancing family and work, lack of good jobs, or anxiety about the state of the world. This can be identified through pre-workshop surveys or classroom activities such as collage images which portray the felt impact. Dialogue can assist in naming what is felt – from the modern condition of overwhelmingness, ethical incongruence, duelling social priorities, and inner competing principles. Later, a political economic analysis can help learners understand that some of these challenges have been deliberately created, according to a specific ideology with its philosophical underpinnings, for money and power benefitting a few.

Asking what learners *most want* can help identify underlying common values and visions from which a productive dialogue can be structured, establishing a respectful environment for the spectrum of perspectives that exist in a classroom. Asking what they *most fear* helps to identify motivators and losses. Fear can also help identify what might be creating nonengagement in sustainability actions, but asking about other *barriers to action* is vital. Two other key areas for questioning are *basic knowledge* and *basic attitudes* related to sustainability and climate change. Aided by this information, appropriate content, visuals, stories, and resources can be found. Further, while the goal may be building understandings and practices for a sustainable *community,* in an individualist society, this approach can more effectively begin with *individual* felt needs then laddering toward a sense of the 'communal I' and an 'expansive self,' when responsibility for both human and nonhuman communities emerges as a natural response (Lange & Houlden, in press).

Practices for midwifing transformation

> In this time of ever intensifying crises, activism alone with not save us. Change will only take hold when we re-member ourselves into a shape that Earth can recognize as her own. The powers that are marching us toward the edge are endemic. They live in us too, binding us in the spell of amnesia and pulling us toward the indulgences that define the modern way of life (Poirier, 2023, p. 203).

Through the structure of the article, I have tried to demonstrate a relationality approach to composting modernity and emplacing ourselves within the living world. This included a gratitude practice, an embodied explanation of naming my place, and some of my kinship relations. I then moved the lens outward to name our moment of epochal shift and the Great Work of educators. A retelling of human history through the lens of the old separation story and an emerging relationality story, sets the context for the alchemy of composting modernity as social change work. Seven questions for identifying pedagogical entry points were offered, providing the groundwork for learner engagement. The final offering is a summary of relationality practices that can build a life-giving way of being.

Gratitude practices

Inserting each learner engagement with a gratitude or thanksgiving practice is important for building a sense of a Nested-I as well as composting entitlement ways of being that do not recognize indebtedness to the living world. Encouraging learners to follow the sun cycles over a year, the moon cycles over a month, seasonal changes, appreciate the life forms and elements that one relates to, or acknowledge the four directions helps to emplace learners in the cosmic turnings and the kinship of the living world. Encouraging

learners to adopt one ritual practice of offering a gift for the first of the day, the first of your food, the first of your water, or other daily activities is a reminder of all that grants life. It fosters a stance of receptiveness.

Embodied practices

We are complex beings with multiple bodies, including an emotion body, physical body, and an energy body. Relearning sensory knowing builds self awareness, fosters a keen sense of being embodied, and develops other-than-cognitive learning. Breathwork, bodywork, and energywork can reconnect atrophied learning pathways.

Breathwork is not only pivotal to health awareness, stress reduction, mindfulness training, and trauma therapy (Brown & Gerberg, 2012), but is one simple way to open learners for receptivity to learning, for developing the witness self that observes self and others (Marti & Sala, 2006), and for feeling relationality[5]. We can develop different forms of breathing for different contexts and 'awaken from our typical hypnotic state of survival awareness and its fearful compulsions' (Sardello, 2010, p. xi). We can understand our own breathing as echoing and synchronizing with the breathing of the ocean and the land, as well as our reliance on the breath of forests. Breathwork can also take us into different states of consciousness.

Bodywork is vital as the conduit for experiencing the world and attuning to the sensation of having a body, especially the gift of embodiment. Attention and concentration exercises help counter the fragmentation of the digital and work world or can act as energizers. Through a body scan, one can attune to their current physical state or attune to their heartbeat as the pulse of life. Understanding and attuning to one's body teaches attunement to the living world (Marti & Sala, 2006). Moving differently means we can self-organize ourselves in different ways. Embodiment practices can also be a form of micro-activism, as micro-resistance to the messaging and demands of modernity as well as racialized, gendered and other structural aspects of violence (Agyeman, 2013). Finally, movement can attune learners to the sense of flow, to learning as process.

Energywork is important for learners to align with their energybody which circulates within as well as 'embraces' one's body (Pearce, 2010). Attending to electromagnetic fields within our body can assist us in identifying energy flow and barriers to energy flow which can lead to illness. Emotional turmoil is an imbalance that creates an incoherent energy field, which others can feel. We can also identify social places of incoherence and coherence, places that are not healthy and places that are healthy with a synchronizing of wave frequencies yielding optimal health and clarity. Transforming energy in the space between can reorient us, remind us that life is inherently regenerative.

Heartwork, which attends to the heart-mind matrix evident through neurocardiology (Pearce, 2010), widens the perceptual capacities as well as widens the range of emotion: slowing down impulsive, defensive reactions and using compassion energy more frequently. Asking learners to constantly widen their circles of compassion within a meditative context can foster relationality (Cornell, 1987).

We can also learn to '"presence" an emerging whole' or rather to 'act in the service of what is emerging so that new intuitions and insights create new realities' (Senge et al., 2004, p. 12; see Gunnlaugson, 2020). Although it appears an inward journey, it is 'tapping into the continually unfolding "dynamism" of the universe' (Senge et al., 2004, p. 12). Finally, engaging learners in becoming 'makers' echoes Traditional learning, often occurring while the hands were busy. Engaging learners with clay, gardening, weaving, ropemaking, basketry, leatherwork, or healing herbs are just some of the manifold ways

that we connect with the materials of the Earth that have previously met human needs, while activating several modalities of learning simultaneously (Prechtel, 2012).

Kinship practices for emplacement

Understanding our emplacement can be encouraged by inviting learners to develop a Kinship Map for the place where they have felt most connected[3]. I typically ask learners to draw a map of key landforms, major water bodies, and label the bioregional name for this place. I ask them to mark their home and other familiar and special places. I ask them to draw the origin of their drinking water, the main regional foodstuffs, and key industries. They can also draw familiar birds, trees, and plants. Gathering learners into dialogue, I ask them to introduce themselves by their kin relations, as I did in the opening of this article. They can then discuss how this fosters a shift in perception of self and others.

Another kinship practice is finding a 'sit spot' in a natural place, preferably wildish (Young et al., 2016). I ask them to sit still for 20-40 minutes, at least twice, which can be difficult given a scattered, active world. They are advised to notice everything, using all their senses. Using a different perceptual channel, I suggest letting themselves be befriended, to be taught by the Land or other species. When they return, we discuss the resistance or difficulty they felt in doing a sit spot, as insights into the body and mind patterning of modernity. Typically, the more resistance we feel, the more we are conditioned by modernity. However, sitting helps to dislodge the bodily patterning of doing and distraction, a composting practice. We then discuss their outer observations from various senses and then any events that may have occurred in response to their presence. We consider the languages and intelligibility of the natural world and other ways of knowing this world. Regularly continuing the sit spot activity in one's life dislodges feelings of 'being apart from' the living world to feeling 'a part of,' a belonging to the living world. In sum, different sensory input can change our neural patterning and thereby our perceptions which can transform our beliefs and behaviours in relation to the living world (Young et al., 2016).

Ecological literacy and the principles of life

Fritjof Capra and David Orr define ecological literacy as teaching the key principles of life which provides a basic comprehension of ecology (see Lange, 2023, p. 276) and how the living world is the 'matrix for all design' (Capra, n.d.; Orr, 1992, p. 33). Fostering curiosity, wonder, and humility through the study of living world dynamics moves from perceptions of a static world to a participative and cooperative one. It can return adults to the experience of childhood with a more sensory, embodied, and intuitive form of knowing. It assists in understanding our bioregion, the keystone species there, and their habits and purposes. The most important aspect of ecological literacy is the discovery that the Wild is what keeps the world alive and vibrant (Prechtel, 2012).

Introducing the nine planetary boundaries and then doughnut economics by Kate Raworth (2017) provides principles upon which to rethink the operation of all our human practices. All human activities should aim to stay within the safe operating space – between the social foundation that provides the basics for all humans and the ecological ceiling that ensures we do not overshoot the planetary boundaries.

Figure 3. Doughnut of Social and Planetary Boundaries. Source: (Raworth, 2017) Reprinted by permission. CC-BY-SA 4.0
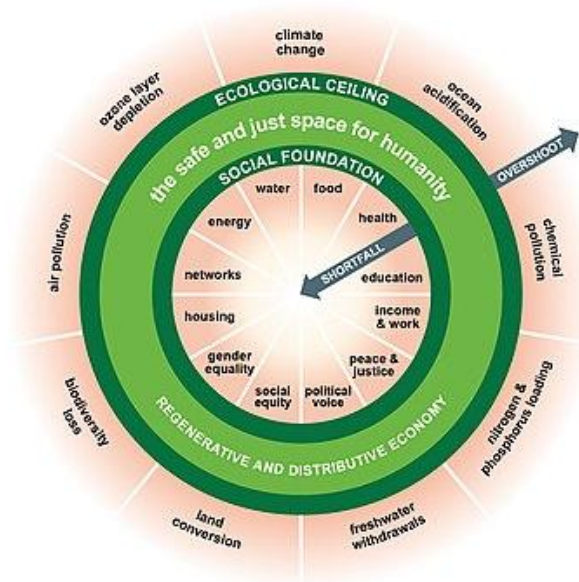
Storytelling practices

Storytelling is an ancient form of teaching and learning. Yet, in the literalism of modernity, stories have been dismissed as child material. In old cultures, Big Stories typically have untold layers of meaning, accessing the great mysteries of life, that can be continually unpacked across a lifetime and the ages of listeners. Story has traditionally been considered an alive force, an energy that comes alive with the telling, with the ritual telling time selected carefully by the storyteller.

Stories are not only teaching devices but Teachers themselves, as a field of vibrational energy which engages listeners holistically. They were the original transformative container as it assists us in re-membering ourselves, illustrating the significance of the oral tradition for Indigenous peoples. Stories were told of a people's origin, their place and kin, stories about morality and conduct, and stories related to rituals such as initiations and birth and death (Lange, 2023).

Finding these stories once again, for one's own life, their family history, for their various peoples, and for their places of habitation is vital. Understanding that we are the stories we tell and then re-storying our personal and human history to assist in composting modernity is one task for this historical moment. These stories will eventually make violent and destructive behaviour more difficult to undertake in a transformed ethical environment.

Wisdom practices for midwifing transformation

Tewa Gregory Cajete understands education as 'breathing in life' or to 'be with life'. Humans are endlessly curious with a readiness for learning, which has often been wounded or dampened by schooling (Olson, 2009). Approaching sustainability and climate education from a wisdom-seeking perspective that engages these deeper levels of

being human is the spiritual facet of education. It is fostering awe, wonder, and respect for the living world around us.

Elements of wisdom, say Jeste and LaFee (2020), include all the foregoing elements, common across cultures and spiritualities, such as compassion and prosocial behaviour, the capacity for self-reflection, emotional regulation and conflict transformation, openness to divergent perspectives, and the ability to make sound decisions. These are relational skills that re-emplace us within the community of life.

Conclusion

In this historical moment, Escobar (2017) calls for a 'transition imagination' where we can sit in this moment thoughtfully, reflect on development of the West, compost the death-dealing aspects of modernity, attune to a life-giving relational way of being, while engaging in anticipatory designing of a pluriverse of cultures (Escobar, 2017) and futures, flourishing well and deeply in our places. As I demonstrated in my own storytelling, through educational practices that reimagine and re-emplace us, we dialectically and relationally surface and disrupt the deep conditioning of Western modernity and its inherent violence. We can sit together in the flow of energies and processes that are emergent of a different way of being.

Notes

1   I am capitalizing words such as Life or Land, to refer to a larger principle, often enspirited, acknowledging this Indigenous way of understanding.
2   My 94-year-old well-travelled educator aunt recently used this phrase, that Edmonton was no longer the small, flat city that it was, meaning that it had been a prairie city on flat land, but also without significant high rises and other imposing development elements.
3   The author has since changed his name to David A. Greenwood.
4   Vanessa Machado de Oliviera was previously surnamed Andreotti.
5   See Elizabeth Lange at https://www.elizabethlange.ca/ for this and other teaching activities.

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- https://www.elizabethlange.ca/services

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Liberalism all the way down? Multilevel discourse analysis of adult education for sustainable development policies

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Abstract

This study analyses adult education for sustainable development policies, examining their dominant discursive orientations – neoliberal, liberal, and critical – across global, EU, and national levels. Focusing on Slovenia and its transnational policy influences in this field, this study highlights the prevalence of liberal and neoliberal discourses combined in various ways alongside a comparatively limited presence of critical discourse. At the global level, the United Nations' influence emphasises liberal discourse aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while the EU policies exhibit a predominant neoliberal discourse, which has solidified at the national level, particularly in the Slovenian policies from the last decade. A prevalent interplay of neoliberal and liberal discourses characterises Slovenian adult education for sustainable development policies, reflecting the substantial influence of transnational actors.

Keywords: adult education for sustainable development, education policies, Sustainable Development Goals, European Union, Slovenia

Introduction

Sustainable development (SD) is crucial for fostering favourable living conditions for all people on this planet and ensuring its preservation, with (adult) education for sustainable development (ESD) playing a significant role, as already emphasised by various authors (e.g., Bourn et al., 2016; Buckler & Creech, 2014; Milana & Tarozzi, 2019; Webb et al., 2019). ESD, under the influence of the United Nations (UN), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and more economically oriented intergovernmental organisations, such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank, has experienced accelerated

development since the turn of the millennium. Since 2015, following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), even more attention has been directed towards this educational concept. The role of ESD is embedded in Target 4.7 of the SDGs, which aims to 'ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development' (UN, 2015, p. 17).

However, there is a risk of an overly instrumental understanding and use of ESD and a danger of ascribing an overly ambitious social role to ESD while minimising the importance of diverse developmental factors (Wolhuter, 2022). This is because 'too much faith in education as a drive of social development is unjustified' since what is mainly needed is 'global change in the areas of environmental and economic policies and better democratic standards' (Skubic Ermenc & Niemczyk, 2022, p. 6). Simultaneously, with the advent of the 2030 Agenda, the role of adult learning and education (ALE) for SD has strengthened through increased political support for ESD initiatives for learners of all ages (Guimarães & Gontarska, 2020; UNESCO, 2020). This has raised hopes for ALE to adopt a more significant role in global educational agendas and policies (Elfert, 2019), despite criticisms of neglecting adult education in favour of lifelong learning and prioritising economic goals in education (Milana et al., 2017; Orlović Lovren & Popović, 2018).

The significant support that ESD receives at the global political level can, however, also lead to certain influences on its conceptualisation. Various policy levels affect this field because the issues ESD seeks to address are global and systemic and must, therefore, be addressed systematically. For instance, education policies must be formulated at various levels, which must be broadly conceived and must interlink the challenges of increasing social justice with the challenges of mitigating negative human impacts on the environment (Milana et al., 2016). Simultaneously, the policies and practices of SD often focus solely on its environmental dimension, even though this dimension is only one of SD's three dimensions, alongside economic and social dimensions. Such a tendency may compromise the holistic nature of ESD as 'education that encourages changes in knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to enable a more sustainable and just society for all' (Leicht et al., 2018, p. 7). Consequently, criticisms arise regarding ESD as a 'superficial' education perspective that neglects the deep-rooted causes of the current social and environmental issues, uncritically perpetuating (neo)colonial relationships between countries and falling short of achieving real transformative effects (Nagata, 2017; Tikly, 2019).

Moreover, the global level's influence of the conceptualisations of SD and ESD is also reflected in the policies of the European Union (EU) and its member states. As stated in *The new European consensus on development* (EU, 2017), the developmental approach of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs is 'fully consistent with EU values and principles' (p. 3) and is to be implemented by the EU and its member states 'across all internal and external policies in a comprehensive and strategic approach' (p. 5). The EU, therefore, plans and promotes various SD policies in which adult education is also given an important role (e.g., EU, 2017, 2018; see also Košmerl et al., 2020). However, EU's influence, along with the influence from the global level, has various implications for different member states (Guimarães & Gontarska, 2020), highlighting how in different spaces – and in spaces within spaces – AESD policy is shaped. Since such transnational policy influences tend to be stronger in smaller countries with relatively young adult education systems (Field, 2018), the national-level analysis in this study is done on the case of Slovenia, which is one of the EU member states where the significant impact of intergovernmental organisations' ALE policy has already been seen (Mikulec, 2021, 2023; Singh et al., 2023). Slovenia is also a country whose policies could be analysed in this study without

any language barriers. Similar to the EU, Slovenia states that it is 'fully committed to all 17 goals of the 2030 Agenda', as well as to the EU's development policies (Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development, 2020).

The explicit statements of the policy-making bodies at the three aforementioned levels (global, EU, and national) regarding the pursuit of SDGs do not seem completely true when the discourses they utilise to shape their policies are closely analysed. In contrast to the declarative policy alignment of all three levels, clear differences in their discursive orientations emerge, which this study aims to examine through discourse analysis, social cartography, and the following research questions:

(1) What are the key global political influences on EU policies in the field of adult ESD (AESD)?
(2) What are the key transnational political influences on Slovenia's policies in the field of AESD?

Discursive orientations as an analytical framework

Among the authors who have extensively dealt with discourses in education policies are Andreotti et al. (2016), who developed a heuristic consisting of neoliberal, liberal, and critical discursive orientations and their interfaces (see Figure 1). They define discourse in line with Foucault (1972) as 'vocabularies, or ways of speaking, generated within the onto-epistemic grammatical matrix of the dominant modern-colonial global imaginary', with discursive orientations representing distinct discursive configurations (Pashby & Andreotti, 2016, p. 776). Andreotti et al. (2016) developed the heuristic based on higher education policies and have also applied it to ESD policies (Pashby & Andreotti, 2016).

Figure 1. Discursive orientations and their interfaces. Source: (Andreotti et al., 2016)
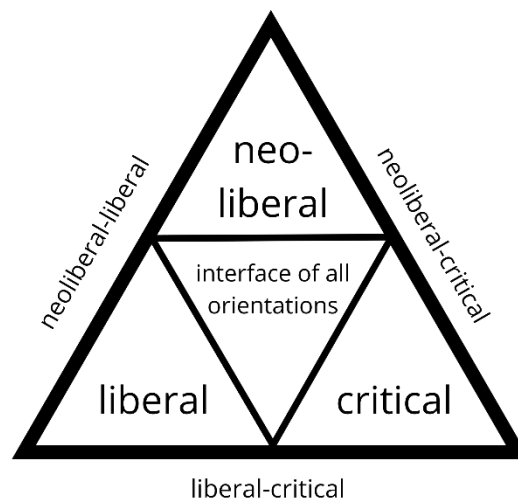
Discursive orientations primarily differ in their overarching goals and conceptualisations of education and knowledge (Andreotti et al., 2016; Pashby & Andreotti, 2016; Pashby et al., 2020). The neoliberal discursive orientation aims to contribute to human capital and economic development and is reflected in educational systems through the weakening of public funding. Hence, educational institutions are primarily accountable to the market and strive to adapt to it as effectively as possible. Further, advertising and competition with other education providers are crucial in this context. Knowledge is perceived as a

commodity and is instrumentally valued primarily within its direct financial worth. Learners are conceptualised as clients engaged in a business relationship with the educator and the educational institution, while the role of the government is to facilitate the functioning and expansion of the market, with its central interest being the enhancement of employability.

Furthermore, the liberal discursive orientation aspires to achieve democracy, equality, the common good, active civil society, inclusion, universal values, individual freedom, mutual respect, the equality of cultures, and a Keynesian economic structure, in which the central force is the unpredictable demand, leading the state to play a crucial role in wealth redistribution and ensuring welfare. Educational institutions are primarily accountable to the state, and education is recognised as a means of participatory democracy and the common good with intrinsic value, helping citizens grow and contribute to social development and progress. Education must, hence, be accessible to all, especially marginalised groups. The liberal discourse aims to harmoniously combine the provision of democratic rights, social welfare, and economic prosperity while maintaining a universal understanding of progress (and governance). However, by doing this, it retains a singular and seemingly universal understanding of development, which obscures the connections between the material and epistemological violence of economic development, helping the Global North remain the 'first world' through the unequal global distribution of wealth and labour.

Finally, the critical discursive orientation strives to enhance social justice, challenge the status quo, and interrogate systemic injustices and oppression (e.g., capitalist exploitation, [neo]colonialism, and racism), including their historical roots. It aims to achieve this by disrupting violent patterns of thought and action and the associated systems of power and knowledge that have become socially normalised and perceived as harmless and self-evident. In contrast to the liberal discourse, it emphasises the transformation and pluralisation of these patterns through historical and systemic analyses of oppressive patterns and unjust distributions of power, labour and resources. Education is similarly understood as a common good with inherent value; however, it carries an ethical responsibility to empower marginalised groups and enable a genuine diversity of perspectives. In ESD, it is imperative to encourage the participation of diverse voices, engage with diversity, and explore alternative development approaches while not separating environmental issues from broader problems of cultural, economic, and political inequalities (Andreotti et al., 2016; Pashby & Andreotti, 2016; Pashby et al., 2020).

It is evident from the description of these three discursive orientations that the heuristic gives preference to the critical discursive orientation, which is based on its theoretical foundations and shaped significantly by critiques of neoliberalism, liberalism or the liberal subject, and modernity (Pashby & Andreotti, 2016). Consistent with these critiques, the heuristic incorporates a postcolonial perspective, recognising all three discourses as part of the modern or colonial imaginary that projects the Western or European perspective as universal and normalises capitalist and colonial social relations (Andreotti et al., 2016). Consequently, all alternatives are perceived as incomprehensible or impossible (Pashby et al., 2020). However, as an attempt to transcend the modern imaginary, the authors propose a postcritical orientation, introducing 'post' traditions (postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism) and intertwining them with the critical orientation to be understood within the dominant imaginary (Pashby & Costa, 2021; Pashby et al., 2020).

In addition to their different orientations and conceptualisations of education and knowledge, discursive orientations differ in their levels of analysis and intervention while

aiming to achieve social change. While the neoliberal and liberal orientations are closest to the methodological level, in which approaches in policy and practice transform while maintaining the same goals – often without critically reflecting these goals (changes in ways of doing) – the critical discourse is closer to the epistemological level, in which individuals' beliefs transform (changes in ways of thinking) – which then also influence their actions and relationships, often catalysing similar changes in others within their social network (Pashby & Costa, 2021; Pashby et al., 2020). However, all three discursive orientations of the dominant imaginary remain at the same ontological level with the absence of changes in ways of existing, maintaining the separation of humans from nature and the determinism of existence with knowledge under the dominance of one – Cartesian, teleological, logocentric, and allochronic – form of rationality (Pashby & Costa, 2021; Pashby et al., 2020).

As the heuristic has already been successfully applied to the analysis of policies related to ESD in higher education (Pashby & Andreotti, 2016), of conceptualisations of global citizenship education (Pashby et al., 2020), and of different educational concepts that address global interdependencies (Košmerl, 2021), this study assumed the heuristic to be similarly applicable to the analysis of policies in the field of AESD. The main reasons for the selection of the heuristic as an analytical framework for this study were the heuristic's alignment with various perspectives identified in the AESD literature and policies; avoidance of common ESD criticisms of the superficial and instrumental treatment of education; and neglect of deep-rooted causes of the current social and environmental issues. The heuristic averts these issues by considering various interfaces of discourses and their positioning within a shared capitalist and colonial metanarrative.

Methodology

The primary research method employed in this policy analysis is discourse analysis, as it 'looks at patterns of language across texts and considers the relationship between language and the social and cultural contexts in which it is used' (Paltridge, 2006, p. 2). Specifically, Gill's (2000) approach to discourse analysis was followed, which eclectically draws on the three main traditions of discourse analysis: critical linguistics, speech-act theory, and poststructuralist tradition. Following this approach, a sceptical (re)reading of all chosen policies was first performed, focusing on their assumptions, nuances, and contradictions. Parts of the policies addressing AESD and exhibiting connections to the chosen analytical framework (discursive orientations) were then selected for open coding, leading to the inductive identification of emerging themes (the main themes are depicted in connection to discursive categories in figures in the results section). Special attention was dedicated to discursive interfaces (interactions of two or more discourses within the same policy goal), as they often highlight important nuances and contradictions within and between different policies and levels. At each level, the policies' discursive similarities and differences were identified (also depicted in figures in the results section), following which a similar comparison was conducted between different levels (presented in the discussion section). Policy influence was claimed only for cases in which the policy-making bodies themselves explicitly claimed it. To further clarify the emerging discursive patterns and their identified policy aims, social cartography was used at each of the analysed levels.

Defined by Paulston and Liebman (1994) as an effective method of providing postmodern visual dialogue – which is 'a way of communicating how we see the social changes developing in the world around us' and a two-dimensional representation of the 'researcher's perceived application, allocation, or appropriation of social space by social

groups at a given time and in a given place' (p. 215) – social cartography problematises 'common-sense' imaginaries, highlighting the limitations, contradictions, and conflicts in their discourses and associated conceptual assumptions, creating space for alternative discourses (Andreotti et al., 2016). By 'mapping relations between and within various epistemic communities and discursive and interpretative frameworks', it challenges the positivist imperative for universal perspectives and singular knowledge (Suša & Andreotti, 2019). Further, Paulston (2009, p. 977), who also described social cartography as a form of Deleuzian rhizome and a heuristic metaphor for the debates of a particular field, identifies five steps in its formation, which were followed in this study: (1) selecting an issue or debate (AESD policy); (2) choosing a broad and representative range of texts and translating their characteristics, ideas, and worldviews (main AESD policies on different levels); (3) identifying the range of positions present in these texts (identified discursive orientations and their interfaces); (4) identifying, locating, and interrelating the textual communities that share these positions and worldviews (different policy-making bodies); and (5) testing and adjusting the map (ensuring validity and comparability across different levels).

The policies selected for analysis are identified as central by the policy-making bodies that adopted them. Furthermore, considering the interdisciplinary nature of AESD, the influence of diverse policies on it, and the aim of comparability across different levels, three types of current policies were selected at each level: (1) a key SD policy (which is not solely related to education), (2) a key ESD policy (at all levels, ESD is more at the forefront than solely AESD), and (3) a key AESD policy (main ALE policy that also addresses ESD). This approach formed the following set of policies for analysis (Table 1).

Table 1. Selected policies

	Key SD policy	Key ESD policy	Key AESD policy
Global level	2030 Agenda	ESD for 2030	Marrakech framework for action
EU level	European Green Deal	Council recommendation on learning for the green transition and SD	Council resolution on a new European agenda for adult learning 2021-2030
National level	Slovenian development strategy 2030	Guidelines for ESD from preschool to university education	Resolution on the master plan for adult education 2022-2030

Results

Global level

The overarching policy at the global level is the 2030 Agenda (UN, 2015), fully titled *Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development*. It identifies 'eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions' as a crucial global challenge and a prerequisite for SD (UN, 2015, p. 1). Its fundamental goals are caring for the planet, ensuring prosperity for all people, strengthening peace, expanding freedom, upholding human rights, and achieving gender equality. At the same time, its 'supremely ambitious and transformational vision' encompasses social development, environmental protection,

and the establishment of a world in which every country enjoys sustainable and inclusive economic growth based on sustainable modes of production and consumption, with democracy and the rule of law as key elements of SD (UN, 2015, p. 3). The 2030 Agenda emphasises that its goals are mutually interconnected and inseparable, balancing all three dimensions of SD: economic, social, and environmental. As the overarching global development policy, it calls for collaborative implementation by 'all countries, all stakeholders, and all people' (UN, 2015, p. 2). The primary responsibility of monitoring the achievement of SDGs at the national and regional levels lies with member states (creating a potential for desired reporting), while at the global level, UN bodies are entrusted with this task.

The 2030 Agenda characterises its SDGs as a 'comprehensive, far-reaching, and people-centred set of universal and transformative goals and targets', which 'involve the entire world, developed and developing countries alike' (UN, 2015, p. 3). The universal conception of development, along with advocacy for universal values, such as democracy, equality, and individual freedom, serves as a key indicator of the dominance of the liberal discourse in the 2030 Agenda. It does so while partially extending into the neoliberal discourse, with its direct focus on economic growth. A few aims, which could be classified as critical discourse on a declarative level, such as 'transforming our world', increasing social justice, and collectively addressing environmental and social issues, can be seen as a combination of the liberal and critical orientations. This is because the proposed solutions do not presuppose actual social transformation and remain within the framework of existing social systems that are grounded in the interplay of democracy, capitalism, and (neo)colonialism. These discourses are similarly reflected when specifically dealing with education, where the 2030 Agenda's key commitment is to provide inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels, especially focusing on gender equality. Adult learners – not necessarily adult education participants – are directly referenced only in Targets 4.4 and 4.6, focusing on a substantial increase in literate youth and adults with relevant skills for employment, decent work, and entrepreneurship.

Under the 2030 Agenda, UNESCO (2019, 2020) aims to strengthen ESD through its global framework titled *Education for sustainable development: Towards achieving the SDGs*, which is abbreviated as ESD for 2030 from here on. The framework establishes five priority areas for the establishment of ESD by 2030:

(1) Advancing policy (systematic strengthening of ESD at all levels)
(2) Transforming learning and training environments (cooperation of educational organisations with local communities)
(3) Building the capacities of educators and trainers (provision of relevant learning opportunities)
(4) Empowering and mobilising youth (provision of opportunities for engagement)
(5) Accelerating sustainable solutions at the local level (viewing of local environments as the most appropriate space for achieving significant transformations)

In addition to the priority areas, ESD for 2030 summarises that its strategic objective is to 'promote ESD as a key element of quality education and a key enabler of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals with special attention to (1) individual transformation, (2) social transformation, and (3) technological advances' (UNESCO, 2020, p. 18). As ESD seeks to contribute to all SDGs, it also seeks to contribute to further economic growth. However, it highlights the tensions between economic growth and SD principles
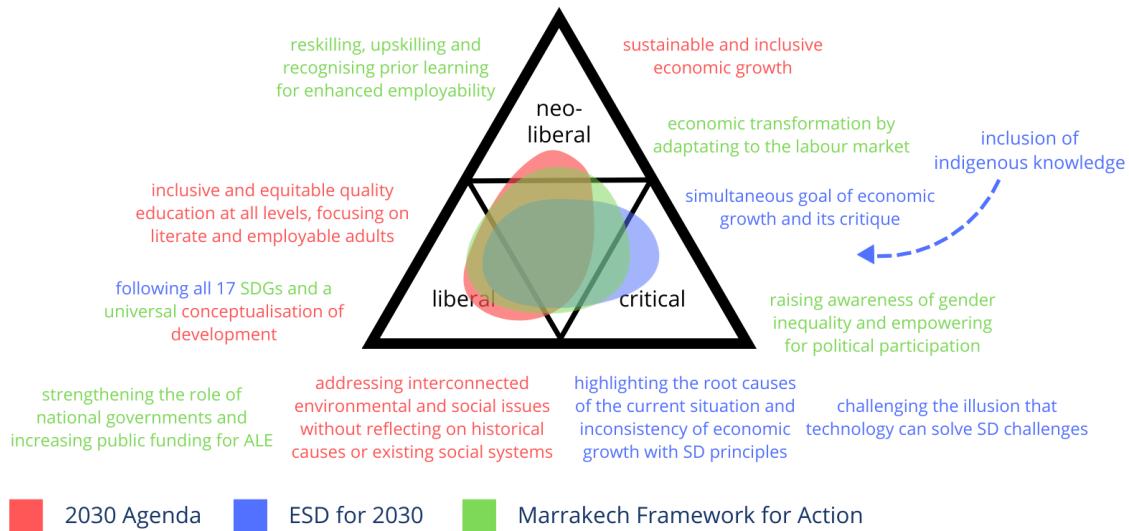
and advocates a critical examination of this relationship within ESD. Consequently, unlike the 2030 Agenda, ESD for 2030 incorporates a critical discursive orientation, additionally highlighting the problematic nature of ever-increasing production and consumption and the need for systemic changes and a transformation of the status quo. ESD must, hence, address the 'deep structural causes of unsustainable development' and 'encourage learners to explore values which could provide an alternative to consumer societies' while critically challenging the illusion that technology can solve most SD challenges (UNESCO, 2020, pp. 5-6). Moreover, the dominance of critical discourse becomes even more pronounced in describing ESD practices. Education is recognised as a means of contributing to the implementation of SDGs; however, it is also perceived as a space for questioning existing social and environmental conditions and fostering a critical and contextual understanding of SDGs. Additionally, there is an emphasis on holistically adapting ESD to specific contexts and target groups; empowering learners to take responsible action and make effective decisions; and exploring possibilities for social transformations through individual transformations. There is also a moderate presence of the liberal discourse in the framework, mainly from pursuing the 2030 Agenda and advocating for the integration of all SDGs into educational practices and policies. While striving for a balanced provision of democratic rights, social sustainability, and economic prosperity, it also strives to maintain a universal understanding of progress. The inclusion of 'local and Indigenous knowledge' is also mentioned, which can be interpreted as an attempt to introduce a postcritical discourse.

Both the 2030 Agenda and ESD for 2030 devote little attention to ALE. However, the *Marrakech framework for action*: *Harnessing the transformational power of ALE* (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning [UIL], 2022) is dedicated to this field. It emphasises its commitment to the 2030 Agenda and, similar to ESD for 2030, advocates for the achievement of all SDGs. The framework encompasses six areas of action for the systemic improvement of ALE: establishing frameworks and governance arrangements, redesigning systems for ALE, ensuring the quality of learning, increasing funding, promoting inclusion, and expanding learning domains. In addition, it sets specific goals for ESD, aiming for greater climate change awareness, a better understanding of SD challenges, citizen empowerment, the adaptation of consumer and lifestyle habits, and environmental political participation. It aspires to contribute to adults becoming 'change agents' at local, national, and global levels and thus role models for younger generations. Simultaneously, ALE organisations could serve as examples in their environments by 'greening their curricula, facilities, and management' (UIL, 2022, p. 8).

The *Marrakech framework for action* exhibits a considerable dispersion of discourses. The liberal orientation is predominant, emphasising education as a common good and a fundamental right for all. There is a focus on increasing public funding, strengthening the role of national governments, ensuring democratic processes and equal access, and preparing older individuals for a meaningful post-retirement life and their ongoing social contribution. The neoliberal discourse is also evident, highlighting the transformation of the economy and the labour market due to demographic changes, industrial progress, globalisation, and climate change. This necessitates providing diverse opportunities for knowledge acquisition and learning support for employment, decent work, career development, and entrepreneurship, including recognising prior learning. The framework also emphasises the 'need to build strategies for reskilling and upskilling, which are necessary to meet the changing needs of societies and the world of work brought about especially by the green and digital transitions' (UIL, 2022, p. 2). In an interface of critical and neoliberal discourses, the urgency of ensuring reskilling and upskilling is also advocated while pursuing economic transformation to achieve carbon

neutrality and environmental conservation. Moreover, critical discourse can be found in this framework, with an emphasis on gender inequality, the digital divide (calling to address online power relations and nurture critical thinking), and the empowerment of adults for political participation as a significant goal of ALE.

Figure 2. Discursive orientations at the global level

reskilling, upskilling and recognising prior learning for enhanced employability

sustainable and inclusive economic growth

neo-liberal

economic transformation by adapting to the labour market

inclusion of indigenous knowledge

inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels, focusing on literate and employable adults

simultaneous goal of economic growth and its critique

following all 17 SDGs and a universal conceptualisation of development

liberal   critical

raising awareness of gender inequality and empowering for political participation

strengthening the role of national governments and increasing public funding for ALE

addressing interconnected environmental and social issues without reflecting on historical causes or existing social systems

highlighting the root causes of the current situation and inconsistency of economic growth with SD principles

challenging the illusion that technology can solve SD challenges

■ 2030 Agenda   ■ ESD for 2030   ■ Marrakech Framework for Action

As evidenced by Figure 2, the 2030 Agenda exhibits the most liberal and neoliberal orientation, while ESD for 2030 aligns the most with the critical orientation (and displays the potential presence of postcritical discourse. Additionally, the *Marrakech framework for action* represents the greatest balance of discourses, encompassing all three orientations. There are, hence, substantial discursive differences between the policies, despite their shared commitment to the 2030 Agenda and the full implementation of the SDGs. At the same time, all three policies demonstrate an awareness of diverse environmental and social issues and universally conceptualise current development, with ESD for 2030 allowing the most room for criticism, including examining the historical causes of this development. It also provides space for critical evaluation in addressing economic growth, highlighting its inconsistency with SD principles, despite aligning, at least at a declarative level, with the 2030 Agenda and its illusion of 'sustainable, inclusive, and sustained economic growth'. The Marrakech framework, in the meantime, does not explicitly address or define this aspect.

EU level

The EU is committed to the 'full implementation' of the 2030 Agenda and is positioning itself as its 'leading advocate' (Directorate-General for Communication of the European Commission, 2022; European Commission [EC], 2020). The current key SD policy of the EU is the European Green Deal (EC, 2019), which places SDGs at 'the heart of the EU's policymaking and action' (p. 3). Its central objective of achieving a fair transition to EU climate neutrality by 2050 is primarily aimed at addressing climate change and reducing environmental degradation while maintaining economic growth. It envisions extensive changes involving the prioritisation of clean and affordable energy supply, circular economy, energy-efficient construction, zero pollution, biodiversity preservation, environmentally friendly food systems, and sustainable mobility. Consequently, it

represents a 'new growth strategy that aims to *transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient competitive economy* […] *where economic growth is decoupled from resource use*' (EC, 2019, p. 2, emphasis in the original). Education and training are two of the identified supportive areas for implementing the deal, with the aim of intensifying discussions in educational institutions with the participants and the broader local community about the changes needed for the green transition. They also include funding for the construction of a more sustainable school infrastructure and retraining and upskilling the workforce in growing economic sectors.

Critical discourse in the European Green Deal is present only in conjunction with the other two discourses. There is a (critical) awareness of the interconnectedness of environmental and social issues, advocating to '*transform the economy with the aim of climate neutrality*' (EC, 2019, p. 4, emphasis in the original). However, this is (neoliberally) perceived as '*an opportunity to expand sustainable and job-intensive economic activity*', strengthening economic competitiveness and fostering economic growth (EC, 2019, p. 7, emphasis in the original). Additionally, the crucial role of private investments, the market, and empowered consumers is emphasised for achieving the green transition, as well as for resolving the environmental crisis through further economic and technological progress, including the necessity of enhancing 'employability in the green economy' (EC, 2019, p. 19). Education is (liberally) seen as a means of involving the public in the planned green transition, emphasising a just and inclusive transition, concern for the most vulnerable, alignment with the SDGs, and the 'EU as a global leader' in future development.

The *Council recommendation of 16 June 2022 on learning for the green transition and sustainable development* (Council of the European Union, 2022) provides a clearer picture of the EU's conceptualisation of ESD, as it is a 'key policy statement highlighting the crucial role of education and training in working towards the goals of the European Green Deal', setting guidelines for member states' 'systemic shift in education' (EC, 2022). The guidelines are summarised in three points:

(1) Strengthen support for education and training systems in contributing to the green transition and SD.
(2) Establish learning for the green transition and SD as one of the priority areas in education and training policies and programmes, and implement or further develop comprehensive and collaborative teaching and learning approaches for the green transition and SD.
(3) Provide diverse learning opportunities in formal, nonformal, and informal settings.

Learning for the green transition and SD is described as a form of support in 'acquiring the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to live more sustainably, in [the] changing patterns of consumption and production, in embracing healthier lifestyles, and in contributing – both individually and collectively – to a more sustainable economy and society' (Council of the European Union, 2022, p. 2). This includes building 'skills and competences increasingly needed in the labour market' and promoting an 'understanding of the interconnected global challenges' (Council of the European Union, 2022, p. 2). Without critical reflection on systemic social injustices or their historical causes, critical discourse is again present only at the interface of discourses, despite emphasising decision-making and action to achieve a sustainable economy and a just society; this

action includes youth's voices and the development of critical thinking. Additionally, promoting justice and inclusivity, individually and collectively contributing to social transformation, and learning to reflect and act to create a more sustainable world and economy fall into the interface of critical and liberal discourses. In the liberal orientation, advocacy for human rights, gender equality, a culture of peace, global citizenship, cultural diversity, and the inclusion of marginalised individuals in learning processes are highlighted, while in the neoliberal orientation, developing learners' skills and competences for the needs of the labour market is emphasised.

The last analysed policy at the EU level is the *Council resolution on a new European agenda for adult learning 2021-2030* (Council of the European Union, 2021), representing a 'vision of how adult learning should develop in Europe by 2030' (EC, 2021). Its central objective is to 'increase and improve the provision, promotion, and take-up of formal, nonformal, and informal learning opportunities for all', including providing 'all the necessary knowledge, skills, and competences to create an inclusive, sustainable, socially just, and more resilient Europe' (Council of the European Union, 2021, p. 9, 11). The resolution aims to raise the EU's learning participation of adults aged 25-64 years to 60% by 2030, establishing five priority areas: governance; the supply and take-up of lifelong learning opportunities; accessibility and flexibility; quality, equity, inclusion, and success in adult learning; and green and digital transitions. These priority areas, hence, align with the *Marrakech framework for action*, with an important difference indicating a weaker focus on increasing funding and a greater focus on green and digital transitions.

A strong neoliberal orientation prevails among the resolution's discursive orientations, which is reflected in its efforts to align educational provision with market demand, manage educational systems based on anticipated future labour market needs and required skills, increase permeability in formal and nonformal adult education for the purpose of reskilling and upskilling, promote competence-based teaching and learning, raise awareness among employers about the importance of fostering a workplace learning culture, and 'provide short learning experiences to acquire or update targeted competences' (Council of the European Union, 2021, p. 17). Furthermore, a focus on the working-age population is evident in the participation target, which is set only for individuals aged 25-64 years. Additionally, neoliberal discourse is intertwined with both critical and liberal discursive orientations. In its interface with critical discourse, neoliberal discourse strives for an 'ecological transformation' through the development of green skills, whereas in its interface with liberal discourse, it emphasises the crucial role of member states' governance and the 'shared responsibility of public and private stakeholders' while supplementing sustainable public funding with other funding for 'all types, forms, and levels of adult learning' (Council of the European Union, 2021, p. 12, 15). The liberal discourse also highlights the role of adult learning in social inclusion and advocates gender equality and intergenerational and intercultural solidarity, with special attention devoted to vulnerable groups.

Figure 3. Discursive orientations at the EU level.

European Green Deal

Council Recommendation on learning for the green transition and SD

Council Resolution on a new European agenda for adult learning 2021-2030
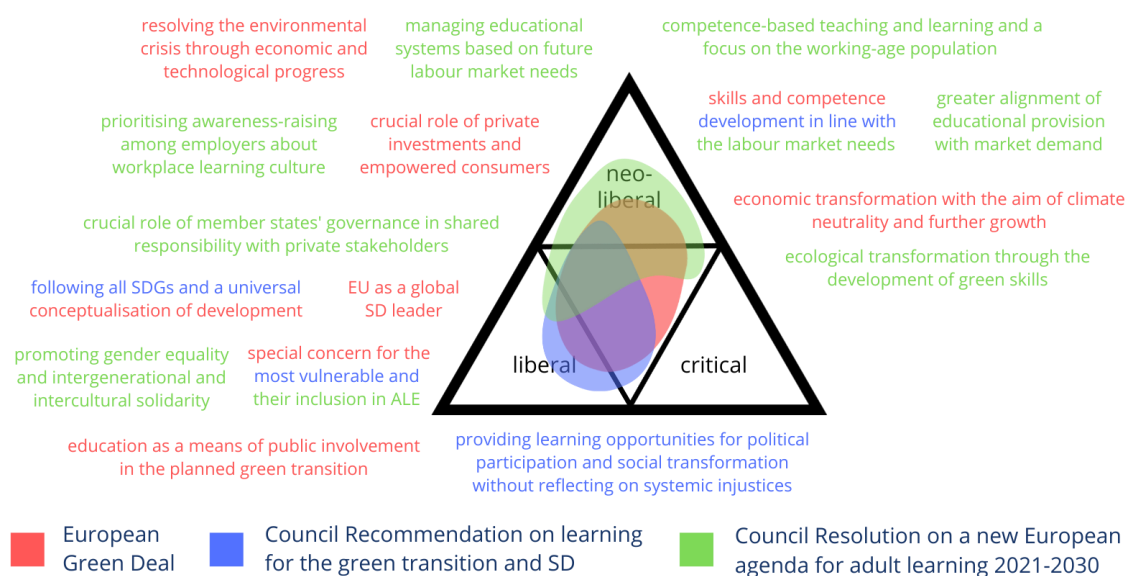
In Figure 3, a prevalent dispersion at the EU level between the liberal and neoliberal orientations can be identified, with minor interweaving also with critical discourse. The *Council recommendation of 16 June 2022 on learning for the green transition and sustainable development* is closest to critical discourse and is the only analysed EU policy with a prevailing liberal orientation, while the other two EU policies predominantly exhibit neoliberal discourse. Despite the European Green Deal and the council recommendation advocating the pursuit of SDGs and the council resolution calling for closer collaboration with the UN and UNESCO, a greater neoliberal orientation and a greater discursive homogeneity are present in Europe compared to the global level. Nevertheless, a notable similarity found at the global and EU levels is their joint emphasis on the necessity of economic growth, which is coupled with the expansion of green sectors and the development of green skills as significant forces in addressing the environmental crisis.

National level

Slovenia regularly aligns its policies with the 'development documents of the European Union and international organisations' and is 'fully committed to all 17 goals of the 2030 Agenda' (Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development, 2020). Its current key SD policy is the *Slovenian development strategy 2030* (Slovenian Government, 2017), which establishes five strategic orientations and 12 development goals. Each of these goals is related to one or more SDGs. One of the strategic orientations is also 'learning for and through life', which appears in addition to creating an inclusive, healthy, safe, and responsible society, a highly productive economy, a well-preserved natural environment, and a high level of cooperation, competence, and governance efficiency. In addition to highlighting the key challenges in the field of 'learning for and through life', the document emphasises 'numerous discrepancies between supply and demand for knowledge and skills on the labour market', low investments in digital skills development, and the inclusion of older individuals in education to increase their workforce participation (Slovenian Government, 2017, p. 11). Furthermore, it strives to

break 'the link between economic growth and growth in [the] consumption of resources and GHG [greenhouse gas] emissions', which can be achieved 'through education and [by] including various stakeholders in the transition to a circular economy' (Slovenian Government, 2017, p. 39). This makes the document the most ambitious policy regarding the role of education in achieving SD, among those analysed.

Given the outlined aims of the Slovenian development strategy, it is unsurprising that the prevailing discursive orientation is neoliberal. This is reflected in its focus on increasing workforce participation, the more efficient allocation of the workforce with greater alignment of its knowledge and skills with the labour market needs, and the development of 'practical and technical knowledge and skills in order to improve employability' (Slovenian Government, 2017, p. 26). In the neoliberal-liberal interface, an additional emphasis exists on ensuring the wellbeing of all citizens through inclusive and green economic growth and high economic competitiveness. In the neoliberal-critical interface, an emphasis is seen on learning and training to strengthen innovativeness, critical thinking, responsibility, and entrepreneurship and searching for 'new development paradigms which take our planet's capacities into account' in conjunction with continued economic growth (Slovenian Government, 2017, p. 5). The liberal discourse's focus is on learning to reduce social exclusion and ensure a high quality of life for all, addressing the learning needs of lower-educated and other disadvantaged groups, and strengthening the rule of law to protect 'citizens' rights and economic development and welfare' (Slovenian Government, 2017, p. 42). Finally, poverty and inequality reduction are emphasised in the liberal-critical discursive interface.

In addition, Slovenia's key ESD policy is the oldest analysed policy, with the *Guidelines for education for sustainable development from preschool to university education* being adopted in 2007. Despite the title suggesting otherwise, the guidelines are not framed solely within the context of preschool and the formal education of children and youth. Instead, their broader goal is to emphasise 'education for sustainable development and to show possibilities for realising sustainable development in formal, nonformal, and informal learning'. They also highlight lifelong learning for SD (Ministry of Education, 2007, pp. 1-2). Furthermore, the guidelines establish five objectives:

(1) Provide normative foundations supporting ESD.
(2) Train educators in ESD.
(3) Ensure appropriate teaching materials for ESD implementation.
(4) Expedite ESD research and development.
(5) Strengthen the cooperation of all stakeholders in the field of ESD.

The guidelines predominantly adopt a critical discursive orientation, which is reflected in defining justice as a key SD area; connecting environmental, economic, and social issues; highlighting the interdependence of the natural, economic, social, and political systems; fostering a deeper understanding of various worldviews; and promoting systemic, critical, and creative thinking about SD across local, regional, national, and global levels. In the critical-liberal interface, there is also an emphasis on increasing equality and participation in decision-making processes, including influencing social and economic development. In the critical-neoliberal interface, economic development is highlighted with consideration of its environmental issues. Further, the neoliberal discursive orientation is present only in its interface with the liberal discourse, particularly while emphasising entrepreneurship development to contribute to social and environmental development and economic wellbeing by involving business representatives to shape ESD. Additionally, the liberal orientation is evident in fostering shared democratic values and social

cohesion, ensuring citizens' 'physical, mental, social, cultural, and economic wellbeing' (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 1).

Similar to the global and EU levels, there is currently no specific policy for AESD in Slovenia. Instead, an important role is assigned to it in the key ALE policy. The current Slovenian policy is the *Resolution on the master plan for adult education 2022–2030* (2022), which defines public interest in adult education, 'guiding adult education policy on the national level and contributing to the systematic regulation of the field' (p. 2980). With the vision to provide opportunities and incentives for quality ALE to all, the resolution establishes six goals: increase adults' participation in lifelong learning, enhance their basic skills and general knowledge, raise their educational level, increase the population's skills in line with labour market needs, strengthen the development and research of adult education, and improve supporting activities for raising adult education participation and quality. Under each of these goals, the vital role of ESD is underlined.

The resolution is mainly influenced by neoliberal discourse, reflected in its emphasis on increasing the employability and flexibility of the workforce, encouraging collaboration with employers in ALE, refining knowledge and skills for industrial transition and entrepreneurship, increasing labour activity, pursuing sustainable and inclusive economic growth, and 'regulating the adult education and training policy so that it meets the needs of the labour market' (Resolution, 2022, p. 2984). Furthermore, the neoliberal discourse intertwines with the liberal discourse in its focus on educating low-educated, unemployed adults to support labour market integration, increasing economic competitiveness and productivity to ensure the population's wellbeing and enhancing the role of state and local governments in human resource development. The liberal discourse is also strongly represented, particularly emphasising its concern for vulnerable groups and respect for diversity and balancing adult education goals among work, personal development, and social engagement. In contrast, the critical discourse is present only in interfaces with the other two discourses. It intertwines with the liberal discourse by emphasising the development of critical thinking, democratic active citizenship, and socially responsible behaviour; it also intertwines with the neoliberal discourse by warning that 'without a break from past practices of economic development and a shift to a circular, green, and sustainably oriented economy […] we will face unprecedented consequences' (Resolution, 2022, p. 3007).

Figure 4. Discursive orientations at the national level.
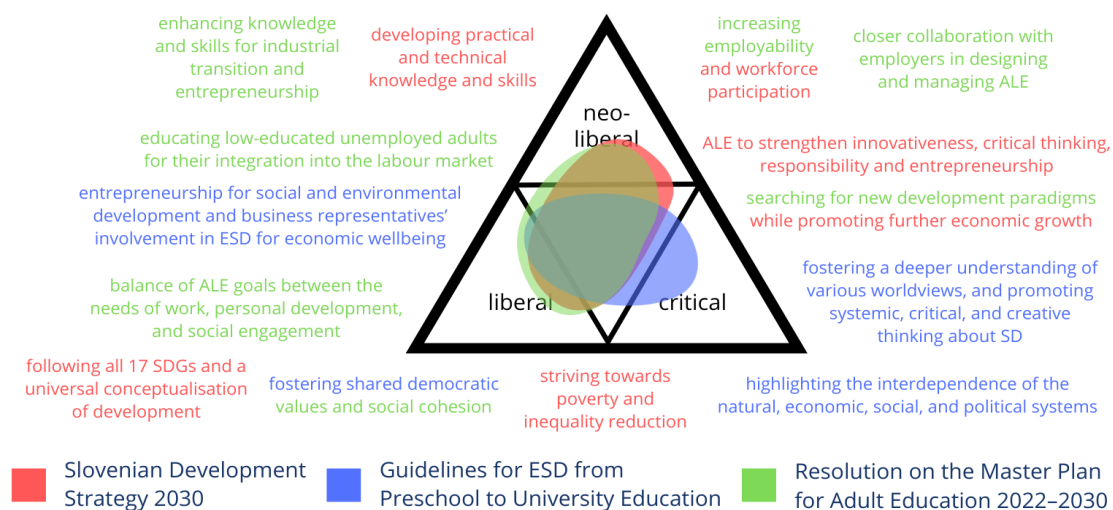
As evidenced by Figure 4, the *Slovenian development strategy* and the *Resolution on the master plan for adult education* exhibit a primarily neoliberal discursive orientation. Of all the analysed policies, they are also mutually the most aligned. Although the development strategy is slightly more neoliberal and less liberal, with additional minor differences in discursive interfaces, the resolution closely follows its discursive orientation. Overall, both neoliberal and liberal discourses are represented in similar measures at the national level, despite the liberal discourse not being the predominant discourse of any individual Slovenian policy. The neoliberal discourse is also less pronounced in Slovenia than at the EU level (but more pronounced than at the global level). Similar to the EU level, no (potential) postcritical discourse was identified in Slovenian policies. However, the guidelines for ESD are noticeable due to their predominant critical discursive orientation, rendering them the only policy at the EU or national level with such an orientation. A commonality between Slovenian policies and higher policy levels is their commitment to sustainable and green economic growth, with the key ESD policy displaying the least neoliberal discursive orientation at each level.

Discussion

A significant influence from higher-level policies is evident in the Slovenian AESD policies – initially from the global level with the SDGs but even more so from the EU level, which also provides a vital part of the funding for adult education in Slovenia. The overarching AESD directions are, hence, formulated at the global level but are concretised at the national level primarily through the EU's strategic frameworks and financial mechanisms. While the UN declaratively has a considerable influence on the EU in this field, as the SDGs are 'fully consistent with EU values and principles' (EU, 2017, p. 2), this study identified substantial differences in discourses and political priorities between the two intergovernmental organisations. While a predominant liberal discursive orientation is identified at the global level, the EU level is primarily neoliberal and discursively more homogeneous. Moreover, Elfert's (2019) claim that the global education agendas under the SDGs reproduce existing social conditions and prioritise economic over humanistic objectives, thus, applies even more to the EU. This is because it more extensively exploits the SDGs to legitimise and promote the neoliberal objectives of its ALE policy.

While the EU exerts a predominant transnational influence on the analysed Slovenian policies, a notable difference exists between policies from the last decade and from 2007. The older policy, *Guidelines for education for sustainable development from preschool to university education*, solely references the European Social Fund within the EU and draws on diverse UN policies. In contrast, the two recent policies identify the EU as their primary international influence, aligning closely with its discursive orientation. Additionally, the more recent policies assign significance to another intergovernmental organisation: the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

In line with the influence of the EU, the more recent Slovenian policies exhibit a prevailing neoliberal discursive orientation (albeit to a lesser extent than the EU policies), contrasting with the primarily critical orientation of the older policy. The neoliberal influence is, in part, derived from the global level, as all three analysed levels converge on a commitment to sustainable economic growth, emphasising education as a pivotal factor in attaining this objective. However, (direct) influence from the global level is relatively limited and exemplified by the Slovenian *Resolution on the master plan for adult education*, which is the only analysed policy from the era of the 2030 Agenda that does not address the SDGs. As in the broader global context, UNESCO's decreasing

influence on education policy is, thus, evident (Elfert & Ydesen, 2023). One of the main reasons for this decline in the Slovenian context is – as noted also in the resolution (2022) – that 'adult education is largely co-financed with funds from the European Cohesion Policy and other European funds, as well as international programmes' (p. 2980), of which the UN is not a part.

The mentioned influences from the UN and the EU are reflected in the relatively equal presence of neoliberal and liberal discursive orientations in Slovenian policies, with critical discourse having a minor presence. Consequently, the national level represents a synthesis of both higher policy levels and reflects the overall discursive landscape across all three levels. Such a distribution of discursive orientations in ESD policies appears to be common. In fact, Pashby and Andreotti (2016) similarly identify a prevalent interplay between neoliberal and liberal discourses, with critical discourse showing a minor presence in their analysis of higher ESD policies. They also emphasise that this representation of discursive orientations falls short of genuine transformation; instead, it perpetuates modern metanarratives and tendencies, thereby sustaining the existing power dynamics in global society.

Conclusion

This study shows that in the case of Slovenian AESD policies, there is not only a policy influence of *liberalism all the way down* but also of *neoliberalism all the way down*, strengthening itself on its path from the global to the national level via the strategic frameworks of the EU. The liberal discursive orientation – prevailing at the global level (with the 2030 Agenda being both most liberal and neoliberal, ESD for 2030 being the most critical, and the Marrakech framework being the most well-balanced) – and neoliberal orientation – prevailing at the EU level – are both well-reflected at the national level in Slovenian AESD policies. These policies themselves claim the important impact of these higher policy levels and closely resemble their discursive synthesis. At the same time, the critical orientation, which has moderate representation at the global level, is also partially retained in the Slovenian AESD policy. However, it is not reinforced at the EU level, contributing to the critical orientation becoming narrower in more recent national policies. As the neoliberal discursive orientation gains prominence, there is a noticeable change in the primary influence on transnational policies within the Slovenian AESD policy, shifting from the UN to the EU. This shift also signifies a step away from following the ambition of 'transforming our world' (as is the aspiration of the 2030 Agenda), instead perpetuating the current dominant economic and social systems that lead the world to existing unsustainable ways of living. Although the AESD only plays a supportive role in this process, it can still be an important catalyst in shaping a sustainable future by challenging the dominant top-down policy perspectives on SD and fostering (post)critical thinking of pressing environmental and social issues, contributing to contrary bottom-up influences.

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The climate crisis as an impetus for learning: Approaching environmental education from learners' perspectives[1]

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Abstract

This contribution examines the kinds of situations in which people begin to learn in the context of the climate crisis. This approach differs from how learning is usually debated in environmental education, which typically focuses on why adults should learn and how this learning can be induced by educational efforts. To understand why and how adults initiate learning, we engage with the debate on concepts of exploring 'impetuses for learning' (Lernanlässe), which has been a topic of discussion in the German-speaking context over the past decades. We explore how this concept provides an empirical perspective on the diverse contexts in which adult learning currently occurs and could potentially occur in the future as the climate crisis continues to unfold.

Keywords: ecology, learning contexts, mass media, social movements, organisations

Introduction

While there is no shortage of demands to address environmental problems through *teaching*, empirical analyses of how *learning* in a range of specific social contexts is related to environmental issues and the climate crisis are rare. One possible explanation for this may be that an important difference has not yet been sufficiently discussed: the distinction between learning requirements as a programmatic agenda and the actual ways in which adults encounter the climate crisis as an impetus for learning. This is astonishing, since a common feature of theories of adult education and learning is their focus on learners' perspectives. Theories of adult education highlight, for example, the learner's reasons for learning (Knowles, 1984), how learning processes unfold in biographical

situations of self-questioning (Mezirow, 2000), how learning is accomplished by experience (Merriam et al., 2007), or how it is situated in individual biographies (Alheit et al., 1995).

Discussions regarding how and what adults learn in relation to the climate crisis usually do not involve such considerations so far. Instead of asking why and how adults *actually begin to*—or rather tend not to—learn, the focus is on why and what adults *have to* learn and what (adult) educators can do to induce such learning, for example by adopting a respective policy agenda such as the Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations (UN). With this paper, we aim to encourage efforts addressing this issue by asking how and in which ways adults understand the climate crisis as something relevant for their learning. Therefore, we align with one particular strand of adult learning theory, which we consider helpful in this regard. This research perspective begins from the question, how and why adults begin to make efforts to learn. We refer to a certain way of discussing this question, which has been developing within the German-speaking context and unfolds around the term *Lernanlass*. Unfortunately, there appears to be no one singular translation of this term in English which encompasses all its semiotic references. *'Occasions for learning'* has previously been used (Ludwig, 2017, p. 52; Rosemann, 2021), but this translation may imply the impression that these occasions occur randomly and that learners may, or may not, take advantage of them. *'Inducements to learning'* highlights the consequentiality of the genesis of learning situations, but could also imply that beginning to learn depends on external incentives. We have chosen to mainly use the term *'impetus for learning'* in this paper, placing an emphasis on the situative constellations and dynamics in which learning and learning efforts unfold.

As a starting point, we take a critical look at concepts of environmental education which aim to justify why learning in the current ecological crisis is necessary. We emphasise that these concepts do not assign systematic importance to how *learning* originates: instead, the environmental crisis appears to be an impetus for *teaching* (Section: The environmental crisis as an impetus for teaching).

We then delve into three models that suggest different approaches to explain the genesis of an impetus for learning. First, learning is discussed as something which emerges while people attempt to solve problems as they pursue their individual reasons for actions (Holzkamp, 1995). Second, learning is discussed as something that is driven by interests which have emerged in the past (Grotlüschen, 2010). Finally, learning is discussed as something which originates from disconcerting experiences of foreignness (Schäffter, 1997) (Section: How does an impetus for learning emerge?).

Our third step expands the focus of these models on how the impetus of individual learning emerges by examining the social contexts within which impetuses for learning originate. We discuss the situatedness of learning occasions exemplarily with reference to three specific contexts: mass media, social movements, and organisations (Section: When does an impetus for learning emerge?).

This paper concludes by discussing the opportunities for analysing adults' learning in the climate crisis that may arise from empirical research on how an impetus for learning unfolds within the specific social contexts in which adults live their lives (Section: Reflection).

The environmental crisis as an impetus for teaching: A short critical review of the development of environmental education

The usual manner of relating learning issues to environmental ones is to deduce learning needs from environmental problems. This can be illustrated by the following three examples from different decades.

Environmental education emerged from the growing awareness of the threat posed by environmental degradation in the late 1960s. Debates on Environmentalism implicated that complex environmental problems cannot be solved only at a political or only at a scientific level. The interplay between demands from scientists, particularly in the USA, for greater social awareness of ecological problems and the emphasis on education by political actors (e.g. UN, 1973) led to the development of the initial concepts of environmental education (Gough, 2012). Educational institutions were considered to play a key role in the imparting of environmental education. The primary goal of the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, for example, was to develop environmental education as part of organised education, with a particular focus on schooling (UNESCO-UNEP, 1990; Environmental Education Research, 2006). The transfer of the problem of environmental degradation to educational institutions resulted in a pedagogisation of the ecological question (Proske, 2002).

In addition to the focus on educational institutions, a discourse emerged in the 1970s in which the crises of the time (including environmental issues) were linked directly to expect learning from everyone (and not only to expect a provision of respective teaching offers): the UNESCO study on lifelong learning, *Learning to Be* (Faure et al., 1972), addresses potential risks to humanity from additional uncontrolled technological advances. It argues that everyone has to have the opportunity to learn if humanity is to gain the awareness and skills that are needed to use and shape technology in beneficial ways. Botkin et al.'s (1979/1998) *Learning Report*, written for the Club of Rome, laments the 'human gap', 'the distance between growing complexity and our capacity to cope with it' (p. 6) and the fact that 'men and women are as yet unable to grasp fully the meaning and consequences of what they are doing' (Peccei, 1979/1998, xiii). In this light, the 'report examines how learning can help to bridge the human gap' (Botkin et al., 1979/1998, p. 8). The report criticises contemporary modes of learning for not yet having prepared society for the complex challenges ahead, it sees itself as a stimulus for discussion on innovative forms of learning: 'What we do assert is that *innovative learning is a necessary means of preparing individuals and societies to act in concert in new situations*, especially those that have been, and continue to be, created by humanity itself' (Botkin et al., 1979/1998, p. 12; emphasis added).

At the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, the debate on environmental issues coalesced around the idea of sustainability (UN, 1987), now focussing operational goals striving for a society which meets ecological as well as, social and economical demands. Agenda 21 sets out the concept of Education for Sustainable Development at a global level (UN, 1992), which was/is not only discussed in relation to school education but also extensively discussed in higher education (Acosta Castellanos & Queiruga-Dios, 2022). Its implementation has also become relevant for adult education (Schreiber-Barsch & Mauch 2019). Learning is, thus, addressed as a means for achieving these goals. However, such references to the concept of Education for Sustainable Development often fail to take into account, how adult education differs from school education (for an overview of the discussion on climate crisis and sustainability in adult education see e. g. Michelsen 2020, Schüßler & Schreiber-Barsch 2021). Notably, the individuality and the situated nature of adult learners' knowledge are not further scrutinized. Instead,

competences are defined, which adults have to develop in order to cope with ecological challenges; that implies shifting the responsibility for dealing with the climate crisis to an individual level. Yet, how adults individually relate to their own learning is not considered in further detail.

The various examples of dealing with environmental issues illustrate that a common method of establishing a connection between ecology and learning is, firstly, to state that an environmental problem exists, and, secondly, to derive a necessity that learning must take place. This necessity for learning is seen to demand a necessity for teaching in order to induce the required learning. Thus, the climate crisis is rather treated as an *impetus for teaching*.

Vital questions remain unasked and unanswered within the horizon of such a perspective, as it fails to take notice of where, how, and by what means the ecological question has already become a subject of the learning of adults.

How does an impetus for learning emerge? – individual-centred models

We propose that the concept of 'impetuses for learning' can be drawn on to delineate the difference between educators' and learners' perspectives more clearly and thereby open up an empirical perspective on contexts in which adult learning actually unfolds in relation to the climate crisis. The guiding question is how and in which ways impetuses for learning emerge in the context of the climate crisis.

To clarify the potential for such a line of enquiry, we first elaborate on three differing approaches that describe processes in which learning originates: an approach which emphasises the perception of problems arising in the course of intentional actions, an approach focusing on the dynamics of developing interests, and an approach that foregrounds disorienting experiences of strangeness or foreignness. We have selected these approaches because each of them, from a different angle, examines processes in which adults relate to the world and to themselves by means of learning. We interrogate and compare these three approaches to further nuance what they contribute to the analysis of how the climate crisis may lead to impetuses for learning.

Handling problems arising in the course of actions: Klaus Holzkamp's subject-centred learning theory

In the German literature on adult learning, Klaus Holzkamp's subject-centred learning theory (Holzkamp, 1995) holds a prominent place as it opens up a deeper understanding of learners' perspectives on their acting and learning (for a discussion of this concept in an international context see Illeris, 2007).

This model of how impetuses of learning emerge locates learning within courses of action and highlights the subjective perspective of individuals and their reasons for acting and, possibly, learning. Learning becomes an option for subjects when they are involved in actions, consciously pursuing self-defined goals, and realising that they cannot reach the desired results. Learning becomes necessary when 'coping with the problem in the normal course of action does not seem possible due to obstacles, contradictions, or dilemmas' (Holzkamp, 1995, p. 183; translated by the authors). The subjects' encountering of such action problems does not always lead them to a learning action; they consider learning as relevant only when the failure to achieve the goal is traced back to the specific conditions and prerequisites of their acting, and learning is perceived as an

opportunity to overcome the obstacle that has been encountered. In this case 'the detour of adding a learning loop' is taken (Holzkamp, 1995, p. 183; translated by the authors).

Holzkamp's model suggests that an impetus for learning can only arise in contexts in which action is already being taken intentionally and for reasons an individual considers justified. In addition, the problems linked to this action have to be consciously perceived: problems only become problems when they manifest as obstacles standing in the way of achieving a selected goal. Thinking of learning in this manner reveals a gap between claiming that learning is inevitable because of societal problems (such as the climate crisis) and asking from where impetuses for adults' individual learning efforts originate.

According to this concept, adults may not perceive any need for learning when the ecological consequences of their actions do not directly affect themselves or when these consequences may even be not perceived by them at all. This might explain, why some adults experience no impetus for learning since there is no immediate and self-evident link between individual actions and the problems caused by climate change. The problematic effects of climate-changing actions only become evident to the individual once the consequences of numerous actions have sufficiently accumulated to become a problem. In addition, causes and effects are related over long temporal and vast spatial distances, only coming to light in the course of complex scientific observations and analyses. Where consequences of climate change cause severe harm, these are actually perceived as problems that represent obstacles to individual action, but it is not only and not necessarily those people who suffer the problems, who would have to act differently to 'cure' the problems.

This leads to the question of how (and to what extent) adults see the climate crisis as a problem that makes their successful pursuit of their own action goals appear doubtful. To what extent, in what way, and for whom do subjectively relevant action problems arise from the climate crisis? In what contexts are these action problems perceived in such a manner that inserting a learning loop appears to offer an expedient approach to tackling them? And in which contexts do adults perceive problems resulting from the perception of a climate crisis which motivates them not to learn or to resist learning expectations? When we refer to questions of this type below, we use the term 'problems in action' to indicate the reference.

Becoming interested: The theory of interest development elaborated by Anke Grotlüschen

The second concept of 'learning impetus' discussed in this paper emphasises dynamics which may lead to learning, but unfold long before actions are taken, even before reasons for action are considered. On the basis of qualitative interviews, Anke Grotlüschen (2010) suggested a model of how interests develop over the course of one's life. This is of critical relevance for the understanding of impetuses for learning since learning efforts derive from interests (see also Dewey, 1913). Grotlüschen elaborates that the development of interests depends on how one comes into contact with a subject matter and how one's relationship with it evolves over time. Her concept of interest development seeks to systematically capture processes of engaging with objects of interest that take place even when individuals are not (or not yet) consciously and intentionally interacting with them.

Understanding interest as a 'cyclical relationship between an actor and an object of interest that has been appraised as relevant and attractive' (Grotlüschen, 2010, p. 183; translated by the authors) opens up opportunities to pinpoint moments of rather diffuse interest at the beginning of processes of interest development. In this context, it becomes

evident that interest development is embedded in social processes and takes place against the background of historical and economic situations (Grotlüschen & Krämer, 2009).

The process of interest development is conceptualised in terms of two dimensions linked in an orthogonal relationship (see Fig. 1). The poles of the habitual axis are distinguished as 'influences' and 'participation', and the poles of the pragmatic axis as 'contact' and 'distance'. The starting point for interest development—the essential prerequisite for it—is an initial contact with an object of potential interest. This contact activates individual relevance systems and the acting subject assigns meaning to the external object (Grotlüschen, 2010, p. 214). Contacts, as Grotlüschen induces from the empirical material, can emerge as isolated (a contact as a single event), continuous (an unspecific initial contact that persists over time), diffuse (the contact is not remembered), or considered (a conscious decision/a decision that has been thought through) (Grotlüschen, 2010, pp. 190–200). Retrospective accounts of contacts tend to attribute a degree of apparent, almost self-evident, continuity to them (Grotlüschen & Krämer, 2009, p. 26). In reference to such continuities the respondents cannot identify specific points in time, but only ongoing experiences.

Figure 1: Genesis of interests at the juncture of two axes. Source: (Grotlüschen, 2020, p. 291; translated by the authors)
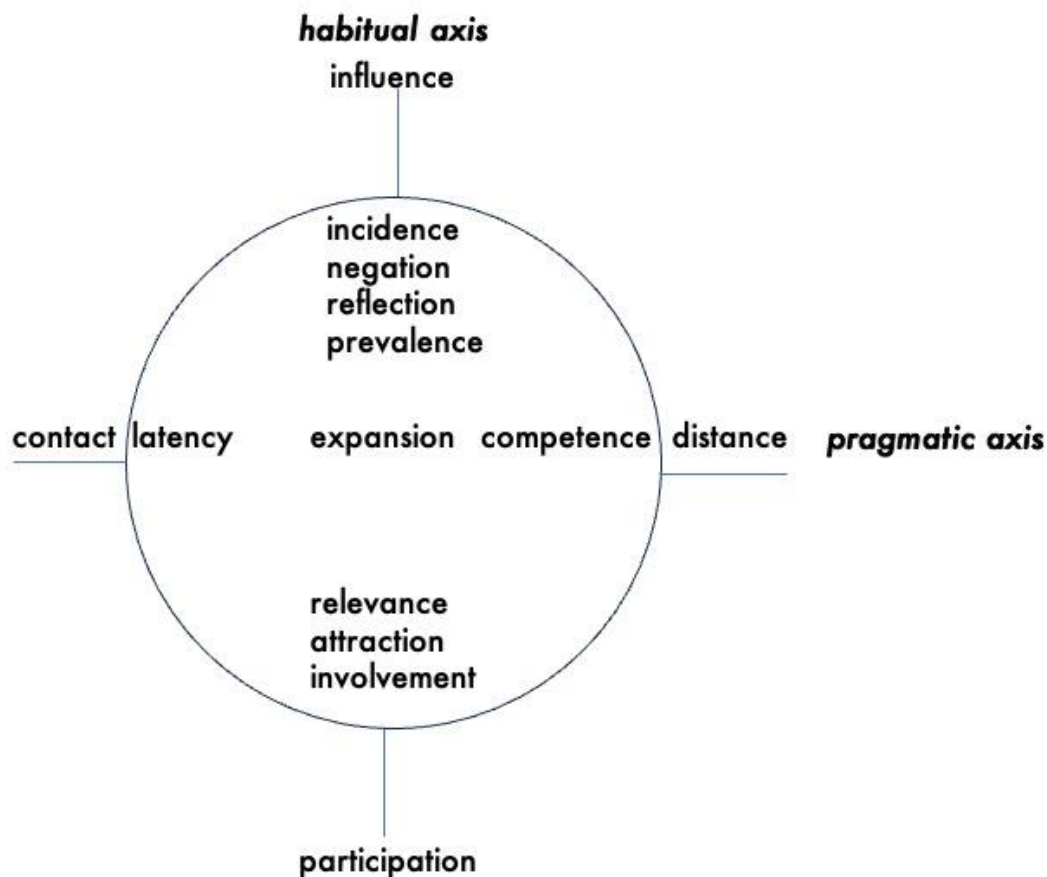
After the initial contact phase, interest development unfolds in three subsequent phases: In the latency phase, the possibly developing interest is still very fragile and may fizzle out (Grotlüschen, 2010, p. 200). In the expansion phase, the interest stabilises, and specialisation takes place; for this to occur, opportunities for participation have to be taken. In the competence phase, when interests have already been stabilised, subjects

frequently have 'considerable and differentiated knowledge' which has, by no means, already reached saturation (Grotlüschen, 2010, p. 209; translated by the authors). It is also possible that after interests have been developed, a fourth phase of distancing occurs when interest drops off.

Considering these observations, it is evident that an analysis of the genesis of impetuses for learning must necessarily also take into account the range of social contexts in which interest arises, since 'every contact with objects of interest... depends on the people and resources in the subject's environment and every appraisal of the factors involved in a contact... depends on the practical or aesthetic yardsticks the acting subject has acquired in their milieu of origin' (Grotlüschen, 2010, p. 186; translated by the authors).

The question of how the climate crisis becomes an origination of learning can be asked more specifically with the help of this model. How, and in what specific social contexts, do adults come into contact with events, concepts and problematisations linked to the climate crisis? How does their relationship with these concepts and problematisations unfold? How do they relate to them, and what conditions exist in their contexts that could support the progression of interest development or may lead them to avoid the issue? And which developed interests could hinder adults from learning related to the challenges of the climate crisis? When we refer to such questions below, we use the term 'developed interests' to indicate the reference.

Being puzzled: Ortfried Schäffter's relational model of dealing with foreignness

The third approach presented in this paper highlights a certain type of social constellation in which individuals may find themselves. Ortfried Schäffter (1997) suggests focusing on relationships between contexts in which adults feel a sense of belonging and those which they experience as foreign. As adults perceive themselves and the world from their 'own position and angle of vision' (Schäffter, 1997, p. 93; translated by the authors), potential impetuses for learning arise as soon as they are confronted with a plurality of social contexts and positions. Such experiences of strangeness or foreignness have the potential to induce learning.

Here, foreignness is defined relative to the self and what the self considers its familiar own. As foreignness is experienced, lines of difference are drawn that distinguish incomparable contexts (Schäffter, 1997, p. 94) and thereby simultaneously create a relationship among them. The boundaries drawn in this manner become contact surfaces that involve mutual interaction, contact, as well as frictions (Schäffter, 1997, p. 118). What is of significance in this process is not that boundaries are dismantled in a search for commonality but that 'distinctions that create meaning' necessarily remain and are understood as productive (Schäffter, 1997, p. 119; translated by the authors). Only through the experience of boundaries does the possibility of fleetingly crossing them become possible.

What is strange or foreign to a given adult because of their specific social positionality is 'experienced as offering resistance and (not only in a positive way) as surprising' (Schäffter, 1997, p. 120; translated by the authors). This experience induces confusions that can become a 'mobilisation event' (Schäffter, 1997, p. 122; translated by the authors). However, learning is only one possible option and by no means the 'normal form' of dealing with such disconcerting experiences. Rather, learning related to foreignness is 'a demanding, higher-level special reaction' (Schäffter, 1997, p. 122; translated by the authors). Often, possibly puzzling aspects are either not registered at all

(normalisation strategy) or individuals focus on the aspects that meet their expectations and see deviations as trivial or banalise them by framing them in familiar contextualisations (Schäffter, 1997, p. 121). Being disconcerted only becomes a trigger for learning 'once other reactions fail' (Schäffter, 1997, p. 123) and 'the presupposed normative profile structuring expectations no longer seems applicable' (Schäffter, 2001, p. 190; translated by the authors). Disconcertment may only be endured when the experience of being puzzled is accepted (see also Kolb, 2014). The relationship between knowledge and non-knowledge is still undetermined at this stage. However, the more non-knowledge becomes undeniable an impetus for learning may emerge, and, the more likely a searching movement may unset 'on which a plurality of learning structures may attach' (Schäffter, 2001, p. 191; translated by the authors).

Schäffter's suggested model of how learning originates draws attention to the significance of the plurality of social contexts that each have their own horizons within which knowledge is deemed valid and relevant (see also Dinkelaker et al., 2020; Dinkelaker, 2024). This perspective is eye-opening for an analysis of how learning derives from the climate crisis, because 'climate change' is a phenomenon that spans highly diverse social and environmental contexts and in which 'geophysical elements intermesh with social, economic, and political processes and institutions' (Stehr & Machin, 2019, p. 9; translated by the authors). This implies that climate change is not only a relevant research area for many scholarly disciplines but also an issue that people grapple with in diverse contexts beyond that of academic research (Callison, 2014). Knowledge that is drawn on to deal with climate change emerges in highly diverse contexts; however, it is communicated across the boundaries of these contexts, and every crossing of boundaries is a potential occasion for experiencing foreignness. This indicates that an examination of how the climate crisis becomes an origination of learning must also analyse the ways in which processing the problems of climate change leads to relationships and exchanges between a diverse variety of knowledge-generating and knowledge-applying contexts. When we refer to relations of this type below, we use the term 'experienced foreignness' to indicate the reference.

When does an impetus for learning emerge? Examples for the situatedness of learning in social contexts

The previous section showed that the analysis of learners' impetuses for learning must necessarily consider the social contexts in which individuals are involved. Therefore, asking how the climate crisis becomes an impetus for learning leads to a scrutiny of the contexts in which climate-related issues emerge. We will illustrate this with exploratory observations from three different contexts.

The examples serve to illustrate the argument that the empirical analysis of social contexts is a necessary part of examining how learning originates. They also illustrate the wide variety of contexts in which the climate crisis can become an impetus for learning, although they do not, of course, represent a complete survey of contexts in which learning is induced by the climate crisis.

The call for individual self-education by mass media

Our first example concerns thematisations of climate-related knowledge in mass media. The numerous and diverse formats in which climate knowledge is delivered can be distinguished in terms of how these formats approach and answer the following question:

'Why are individuals seeking this knowledge?' As media producers can only have limited insights into the individual impetuses for learning that motivate their audiences, they have to resort to assumptions and conjectures regarding the ways in which the global climate gains relevance to individuals.

Guides and self-improvement books promise to empower readers to deal with practical problems of everyday life (Dinkelaker, 2022a). Hence, the action contexts (*problems of action*) that are invoked when adults are addressed as people with an interest in climate-related learning (*developed interests*) can be identified by scrutinising such literature.

In the following, we compare four guides that deal with the climate crisis and which had been selected according to the results of a web search in the year 2020. The German search terms *Klima* (climate) and *Ratgeber* (literally 'giver of advice', but widely used as a description for the genre of companions, self-help, or self-improvement literature) were used. Care was taken to ensure that the selected guides adopted different approaches to stating the problem that they address (Dinkelaker, 2022a).[2]

The premise of the guide called 'Klimasparbuch Eurodistrikt Strasbourg-Ortenau' ('Eurodistrict Strasbourg-Ortenau Climate Savings Book'; translated by the authors) is that readers can save money and energy by following the advice and using the vouchers it contains (EVTZ Eurodistrikt Strasbourg-Ortenau & oekom e.V., 2019, p. 3). This companion links the collective problem of saving energy to an opportunity to make progress on the individual problem of reducing one's cost of living.

The slim volume 'Every Day for Future' (Prima Klima E.V., 2019) presents 100 suggestions for people motivated by Greta Thunberg's example to take action themselves to address climate change. The proposals for action in this companion begin from the premise that the reader will be affected by climate change in the future and changing one's own ways of acting now can immediately help to mitigate this looming disaster.

'Der Klima-Knigge' ('The Climate Book of Etiquette'; translated by the authors) promises to familiarise readers with essential aspects of adopting a lifestyle suitable for meeting the challenges posed by climate change (Grießhammer, 2007). The problem that is assumed to be the readers' motivation for reading the guide is that they desire to be perceived as responding to the collective challenge of climate change, yet lack knowledge of appropriate actions and which factors climate-savvy behaviour needs to consider.

Finally, the autobiographical companion by German TV presenter Janine Steeger, 'Going Green', advertises that the book explains 'why one doesn't have to be perfect to protect the climate' (Steeger, 2020; translated by the authors). The problem emphasised in this guide is that making lifestyle changes in order to mitigate climate change challenges the handling of expectations of one's social circles and balancing one's self-identity.

The guides presented here appear to provide answers to *learning motivations deriving from individual actions* and offer help for individuals who are in their own learning loops (*problems in action*). Yet, these media offers do not solely react to questions that have already emerged. Although the rhetoric of giving advice presupposes that a problem already exists, the books in fact suggest possible motivations which potential readers may wish to adopt. The opportunities for knowledge transfer and self-examination offered in these media are presented to readers as specific suggestions for how they can understand their own life situations and the connections of these situations to the environmental problems facing society and how this can be used as opportunities for individual learning (Carvalho, 2010). Hence, these media offerings should be considered as potential originations of learning in and of themselves.

Further, these guides assume that readers have already come into contact with the climate issue. They, hence, come in at an advanced moment in the *formation of interests* (*developed interests*). These contacts are taken as the starting point for presenting readers with new aspects that they may not yet have considered. The guides portray themselves as authoritative sources that can be consulted for the purpose of deepening an interest. Thus, the focus is more on offering readers opportunities to identify with what gives them a familiar sense of belonging than on confronting them with *disconcerting foreignness* (*experienced foreignness*). The information in the guides that is expected to be new and different for readers is plausibilised in the context of the background experiences that they are assumed to have already had. In this context of media-based knowledge transfer, it is precisely the deproblematisation of differences that creates the conditions for dealing with what is still unknown.

Collective self-pedagogization and impetuses for teaching in climate movements

Our second example for the social contextualisation of individual occasions for learning is drawn from the context of social movements (on learning in social/environmental movements, see, among others, Foley, 1999; Hall et al., 2012; Kluttz & Walter, 2018; Ollis, 2021; Pasino, 2023; Trumann, 2019; Walter, 2007). This example encompasses a range of contexts in which impetuses, not only for individual learning but also for collective learning efforts, are discussed.

As an example, we observed the Transition Town movement in the context of a student research project that was part of a seminar entitled 'The Social Significance of Adult Learning: The Example of the Climate Crisis' (translated by the authors) and took place in the year 2021 at the Martin-Luther-University in Halle, Germany. The Transition Town movement was sparked by an appeal made by a single individual in Great Britain in 2006; it is organised in a decentralised manner in numerous cities worldwide and sees itself—as 'The Essential Guide to Doing Transition' puts it—as a 'learning network' that 'can create change more quickly and more effectively, drawing on each other's experiences and insights' (Transition Network, 2016, p. 9). The aim is to enable each and every individual to make a contribution in their own way to collectively bring about an 'influence change', 'developing and guiding social and economic systems toward sustainability, social justice, and equity' (Transition Network, 2023). The kind of initiatives that arise within the movement range from organising swap shops and consumerism-critical urban walks, to developing future-oriented spaces such as community gardens, urban farms, and kitchens. The starting point for the student research project was an overview of these various initiatives of the movement provided on the following web address: https://www.transition-initiativen.org/liste-der-transition-initiativen. The examples for the research project were compiled on activities undertaken at the local level by several Transition Town initiatives. Care was taken to capture the diversity of the activities on offer.

Unlike the contexts that involve knowledge transfer via the media , the focus here is not on claiming an individual problem, but on claiming a problem of joint action: achieving societal and cultural change (*problems in action*). Establishing and consolidating suitable forms of collaboration and cohabitation are considered a prerequisite for this. This is consequential for how impetuses for learning emerge. To begin with, the learning subject is now a 'we' that collectively addresses itself as a learning collective (see also Proske, 2002). The individual learning challenges arising during the pursuit of this collective learning mission recede into the background. Instead,

a structure of learning impetuses is emphasised that arises out of shared concerns and a shared commitment to change. This creates a focus on unsolved action problems (relating to the shared goal of living in a climate-friendly manner) that only can be countered by entering *collective learning loops* with a focus on experimenting with new ways of acting. Further, networking with other groups and working at the local level is anticipated to boost creativity and the effectiveness with which ideas can be realised.

In this movement, *experienced foreignness* arises as a topic when the groups attempt outreach aimed at people who have not (yet) joined the movement. In this context, foreignness initially appears not as an impetus for learning but rather as an impetus for teaching. Because the movement aims to spread through society, its learning efforts are directed both inwards and outwards and address both those who already belong and those who are potential participants. Care is taken to ensure that projects are visible to the public and can achieve the goal of awakening interests (*developed interests*). For example, they take place at locations that are easily accessible, and the threshold for becoming involved is kept low. The groups monitor their actions to track how these activities can yield impetuses for learning for others. They consider the action problems that confront people and which they can address with their solutions (for example, a mobile kitchen with a sustainable food offer to solve the problem of catering at events). The groups think about how they can ensure *developing interest* in relevant topics (for example, by installing signs to mark trees endangered by climate change in a public park) and reflect on how *experienced foreignness* can be designed in a manner that opens up the scope for productive responses.

Thus, the movement is based on an implicit model of initially marginal participation leading to people taking on progressively greater responsibilities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It seeks opportunities to bring people who are not yet engaged in the movement into contact with its topics and projects. It invites people to get involved and, in the process, to differentiate and deepen their interest in specific topics (*developed interests*). Finally, it also requires the participation of people who have already reached the 'competence phase' of interest development. Treating the problems that the movement tackles in the course of its work as challenges of collective learning leads to situating the different levels of interest development within an overarching shared framework.

Making collective and individual impetuses for learning a subject of discussion in this manner creates a context of self-examination in which individual learning can potentially emerge by being involved in joint action.

Organisational roles dealing with climate-related issues

Role expectations in organisations represent a third example of how dealing with the climate crisis in social contexts induces impetuses for individual learning. Members of an organisation come into contact with climate-relevant problems whenever climate goals are defined, and climate decisions are prepared and taken there. The individuals' organisational roles and the tasks they entail then become a potential inducement to learning.

One example of members of organisations coming into contact with climate issues is the Climate Alliance, a European network of cities, districts, federal states, NGOs, and other organisations with a focus on achieving climate change mitigation at the local level (Boswell et al., 2012; Damsøn et al., 2016). In 1992, the City of Halle (Saale), situated in the Eastern part of Germany with roughly 240.000 inhabitants, joined this organisation, thereby committing itself to steadily reducing local greenhouse gas emissions in line with the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement.

The observations presented below were made by the authors in the context of a pilot study in the year 2021 undertaken in the context of preparing an application for a third-party research funding, striving for a project that reconstructs the communication of climate knowledge across different social contexts.[3]

The first local authority climate action plan of the City of Halle (Saale) was developed in 2013 and is regularly updated (City of Halle [Saale], 2020). In addition to listing sub-goals to be reached by certain points in time (the achievement of which is continuously monitored), the plan also specifies action items for achieving the goals. A total of 52 items are defined and allocated to specific action areas: implementation structures, urban development, private households, companies, local authority facilities, energy supply, and transport (City of Halle [Saale], 2020).

Employees of the City of Halle (Saale) or of any of the enterprises that the city owns come into contact with these action items when a certain aspect of the delivery of these goals is situated in their sphere of responsibility. The challenges which employees find themselves confronted with vary strongly depending on where exactly their specific roles are located in the city's complex administrative and entrepreneurial structures. For example, the questions that the climate change mitigation plan raises for executives at the city-owned energy company are rather different from those it poses for staff at the city-owned housing association. The problems fielded by an employee in the established 'Service Centre for Climate Change Mitigation' are structured differently from the problems facing a city councillor who bears a share of responsibility for planning-related decisions. Whenever an organisation's member is responsible for solving a particular problem but does not yet know how to handle it and also cannot delegate the responsibility, an impetus for learning is generated (*problems in action*) (Dinkelaker, 2009). People in this situation are confronted with the need to balance the performance expectations they face, and the competences attributed to them.

How individual organisation members with their own biographical and lifeworld backgrounds react to these expectations of change is not wholly predetermined by where their roles are situated within the organisational structure. *Interest* in related topics may have been previously *developed* or the person may just be beginning to get in touch with them through changing assignments. However, the experience of being confronted with organisational goals of effecting change nevertheless becomes a shared basis for approaching learning and knowledge across the organisation.

One of the key features of Halle's climate change mitigation plan is that it aspires to involve widely diverse actors in planning and delivering the action items. Considerable significance is attached, for example, to dialogue with citizens as well as cooperation with voluntary initiatives and other organisations. Moreover, the specific process of drafting the plan and its updates is not implemented only within the city administration or city-owned enterprises. An external enterprise with specialist expertise in climate change mitigation at the regional level was commissioned to assist in drafting the plans. This diversity of actors gives rise to numerous interactions among people with diverse backgrounds in knowledge generation and knowledge application contexts. Thus, the potential for *disconcerting experiences of foreignness* to arise during these encounters is a given.

The example of the City of Halle (Saale) shows that individuals can encounter climate-relevant topics and be confronted with problems related to transitioning to climate-friendly economic activity (*problems in action*) without necessarily being motivated by personal insights into the importance of the climate issue or subjective feelings of being affected by it. They may have to deal with new, uncommon perspectives (*experienced foreignness*) purely as a result of the organisational position they occupy.

Contact with the topic (*potentially developing interest*) can result merely from being a member of an organisation and engaging with one's role in that context. The specific topics that prove to be of relevance vary depending on these organisational roles.

Therefore, to understand how the climate crisis becomes an impetus for individual learning, it is necessary to observe who is confronted and in what manner, with organisational goals and transformations prompted by the climate crisis, and how the affected people navigate the organisational issues that arise against the background of their own biographical and lifeworld positions and perspectives.

The plurality of social contexts in which impetuses for learning emerge

Taken together, the three contexts discussed as examples demonstrate that adults in a range of social contexts relate to the climate crisis in different ways and find themselves thrust into different relationships with it. The conditions in which an impetus for learning emerges depend on how people are situated in the specific contexts in which they participate. This clarifies that the climate crisis does not 'wait' for adults to engage as individual learners prompted by its issues. On the contrary, individual learning is preceded by communication regarding the structures of the problems that it addresses. Whenever the climate crisis is spoken and written about, it is interpreted in different ways and connections are established to people who are confronted with it in one specific manner or another. Therefore, in pursuing the question of how the climate crisis becomes an impetus for learning, it is important to include an examination of the processes that create relationships between the climate crisis and specific people (or groups) and the processes of addressing specific people (or groups) in this context. It then becomes possible to interrogate how such processes become occasions for adults to enter into a relationship with the issue of the climate crisis as learners (or as learning-rejecters).

Reflection: The potential of the concept 'impetus for learning' as an analytical tool

In this contribution, we inquired into the degree to which the concepts of a learning impetus enable us to gain more analytically differentiated and better empirically grounded insights into the relationship between adult learning and the climate crisis. We have shown that it is possible to understand conditions of learning in the climate crisis when we utilise these concepts. In a first step, we identified that existing conceptualisations of how impetuses for learning emerge allow climate-relevant learning to be extricated from programmatic agendas imposing societal learning expectations and instead placed in the context of a plurality of forms of individual appropriation of knowledge regarding the climate issue. We identified perceiving problems in action, developing interests, and experiencing foreignness as relevant factors from which learning processes may arise. We then emphasised the relevance of the social contexts in which individuals are engaged. Social contexts have to be taken into account in the analysis of for whom, how, and when something becomes a problem. These contexts must be considered in order to understand the opportunities, limits, and resistances that arise in the course of interest development; moreover, they have to be focused on tracing where adults encounter disconcerting foreignness.

Thus, these contexts constitute the 'conditions of acquisition' (Kade, 1993; translated by the authors) in which the climate crisis can become a starting point for learning. We sought to justify such a perspective in this article and to strengthen the necessity of

accounting for both the structure of learning impetuses with their individual significances and the structures determining the social genesis of the learning impetuses' specific constellations.

In this paper we do not deliver any arguments on which climate change related forms of learning, which learning goals or subjects of learning may be of specific relevance and which may be even misleading. The approach followed here does not allow such judgements. This does not mean, that such judgements are not of importance. Yet, they have to be discussed within other theoretical frameworks. The framework we propose allows to understand, why learning is judged to be relevant and important by learners who are engaged in it. Whether such learning is judged also from a pedagogical perspective as relevant and important remains another question, which has to be discussed elsewhere. Focusing on learners' impetuses for learning can nevertheless open up new empirical perspectives on how learning comes about in the context of the climate crisis. This approach also facilitates finding new ways of fostering learning. It helps to identify situations in which adults already learn and may need support. Focusing on impetuses for learning also assists in finding ways to initiate learning processes, whether by addressing relevant problems in action, by nurturing the development of interests, or by encouraging adults to face their experiences of foreignness. Initial considerations regarding learning in the climate crisis by asking about learners' impetuses for learning furthermore enables a critical review of teaching and learning concepts which derive learning necessities from a predefined 'objective' analysis of environmental issues.

Notes

[1]   The paper 'The Climate Crisis as an Impetus for Learning: Approaching Environmental Education from Learners' Perspectives' was first published in German in the *Zeitschrift für Weiterbildungsforschung*. The English version of the paper has been updated and revised content-wise. Original CC-BY license: Dinkelaker, J., & Stimm, M. (2022). Die Klimakrise als Lernanlass. *Zeitschrift für Weiterbildungsforschung*, *45*, 33-50. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40955-022-00211-z

[2]   The analysis focused on reconstructing the guides' construction of their addressees, the action problems the addressees were assumed to be facing, and the foundations upon which the claims to knowledge in each companion rest.

[3]   The analysis was based on a 'map' drawn as part of the study (based on publicly available information) to reveal internal and external cooperative relationships that were mentioned in the context of presenting the local authority's work on a climate change mitigation plan.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship or publication of this article.

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Carving space to learn for sustainable futures: A theory-informed adult education approach to teaching

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Abstract

This article addresses the pressing need to reimagine education for sustainable futures amidst the socioecological crises of our time. Grounded in the recognition of modernity as profoundly alienating and unsustainable, we argue for an education informed by theory, critical pedagogies and critical sustainability research. Through an example from our own teaching practice, where we focused on pace, place, connections and modes of engagement, we demonstrate how adult educators can draw on theory to deliberately shape teaching. Highlighting the unsustainability of social acceleration, we encourage educators to slow down and carve out a space for profound engagement with sustainability. Drawing on diverse theoretical frameworks, we propose an approach that cultivates a sense of embeddedness in place and connection to oneself, others and the natural world. Finally, we argue that education for sustainable futures necessitates a departure from modernist paradigms, inviting educators to envision transformative pedagogies that foster critical awareness and societal change.

Keywords: sustainability, critical pedagogy, adult educators, teaching design, modernity

Introduction

As of 2022, six out of the nine proposed scientific planetary limits representing a safe biophysical operating space for humanity to thrive and develop have been exceeded (Richardson et al., 2023)[1]. Biodiversity loss has intensified to such an extent that,

according to some, human activities are driving the sixth mass extinction of life on Earth (Cowie et al., 2022). Many of the easily obtainable non-renewable resources on our planet have already been depleted, and renewable resources are being consumed at a rate faster than that at which they can be replenished (Galaz & Collste, 2022). In short, we are living in a time marked by a socioecological crisis where climate change, ecological breakdown, social justice and public health crises intertwine and will continue to challenge us in decades to come. Scientists have repeatedly, and for several decades now, shown that this is due to ecosystem degradation, pollution and high levels of toxicity in our food and environment – which, in turn, are the result of both the planet and people being exploited (Gupta et al., 2023). Scholars across scientific fields and disciplines have linked these destructive practices to industrialism, consumption and the incessant pursuit of economic growth (Angus, 2016; Galaz & Collste, 2022; Schmelzer et al., 2022; Smetschka et al., 2023), as well as to the implicit ontological assumptions of modernity, such as human supremacy, linear development and progress and social acceleration (Chakrabarty, 2022; Graeber & Wengrow, 2021; Rosa, 2013; Stein et al., 2022; Swillens et al., 2023). In light of such monumental challenges, we are interested in how we as adult educators and education researchers can leverage our knowledge to emancipate learners, promote sustainable practices and transform the systems that perpetuate environmental degradation and social inequality.

In this article, we argue that education for sustainability[2] must be a practice informed by theory. More precisely, education aspiring to assist in societal transformation needs to draw on critical pedagogies such as those developed within the field of adult education. Through an example from our own teaching practice where we focused on pace, place, connections and modes of engagement, we demonstrate how adult educators can draw on theory to deliberately shape teaching. Highlighting the unsustainability of social acceleration, we encourage educators to slow down and carve out a space for profound engagement with sustainability. Drawing on diverse theoretical frameworks, we propose an approach that cultivates a sense of embeddedness in place as well as connection to oneself, others and the natural world. We start by framing the need for our teaching design as the unsustainability of modernity. Then, we situate ourselves and our work as adult educators and researchers. We explain what each activity seeks to achieve and which theoretical grounding we draw on. We end our exposition by discussing the potential benefits of adult educators thinking carefully through theory when planning and engaging in practice and argue that education for sustainability requires us to pay particular attention to time, place and connections.

Disconnection and alienation: The unsustainability of modernity

Late modernity – the era we are currently living through – is characterised by shallow connections and the fragmentation of existence as 'lived events no longer link to each other, to history, and to one's own individual identity' (Rosa, 2013, p. 307). This encourages a culture of interchangeability and disposability, driving exploitation, unsustainable consumption and waste production. The fragmentation of existence reduces societal cohesion, alienating us from each other and our surroundings. This can create or reinforce social divides, injustices and exploitation and affect mental health, eliciting feelings of futility and alienation (Hertz, 2020; Nagoski & Nagoski, 2020).

Rosa (2013) attributes this alienation to modernity's acceleration, where rapid technological advancements increase the speed of existence. From the invention of the vehicle, electricity and assembly line to the Internet, live content streaming, Alexa and internet banking, change is occurring at an ever-increasing rate. As a result, the time

required to complete a task or engage in an activity is decreasing exponentially, both on scale and for the individual. For example, building a car or printing a book can be easily done in under an hour, and travelling to the opposite side of the globe is almost as easy as imagining the place. Such *technical acceleration* 'implicitly transforms our relations … and hence the mode and manner of our being-in-the-world' (Rosa, 2013, p. 304), making it increasingly difficult to establish and maintain connections to specific persons, places and things and encouraging shallow relationships where 'everything and everyone' is exchangeable.

This technical acceleration, Rosa (2013) argues, is also accompanied by a faster *pace of life*. Travelling faster and over greater distances, for instance, has changed how we socialise across geographical locations, how we think about ourselves and how much we expect to pack into a day or a lifetime. This life pace acceleration has led to perpetual stimulation and constant movement, as we flick between activities, contexts and roles at the click of a zoom-meeting button or the buzz of a notification alert. This *busyness of constant activity* is qualitatively different from *genuine experiences* and keeps us from engaging deeply with people, places, thoughts and things. While high levels of activity by themselves do not have to be detrimental, this acceleration becomes perverse as it disrupts social and personal narratives, rendering the present both futureless and separate from the past. Unsurprisingly, this disconnection is linked to unsustainable consumption patterns, such as excessive commuting and stress-induced shopping, which are driven by capitalist productivity principles (Grauer et al., 2022; Rau, 2015). This has important implications for education that aims to facilitate sustainable futures.

Research on time and sustainability (cf. Grauer et al., 2022) emphasises recovering personal needs and well-being *as existential questions* rather than an emptiness to be filled through consumption. It also argues for the need for increased reflexivity on how time use and lifestyle choices affect the environment. For societal transformation and sustainable futures to be possible, we must engage with both practices of time use and conceptualisations of time. Pedagogically, it, therefore, makes sense to take *time use, temporalities and rhythms* into consideration when designing teaching and learning activities aimed at carving out a space for learning for sustainable futures. Similarly, *the kind of attention* we pay to people, places and things – the mode of engagement – also has pedagogical implications. In relation to outdoor education, Gruenewald (2003, p. 645) warns that a distant, disengaged approach 'impoverishes human experience, conceals from view the correspondence between ideology, politics, and place, and potentially leads to biological and cultural extinctions'. In contrast, education for sustainability must aim to promote a sense of *being embedded in place*, connected to ourselves, others and the natural world (Gruenewald, 2003; Lange, 2023; Pisters et al., 2019). To work past shallow connections and a sense of alienation, it can also be fruitful to adopt a relational approach (Walsh et al., 2020) and strive to embody values such as openness, generosity, appreciation, mutual respect and responsibility, collaboration, dialogue and creativity (Pisters et al., 2019). While such an approach is commonly associated with social justice initiatives, these are also *ecological values* which sustainability initiatives, therefore, should strive to enact (cf. Bianchi et al., 2022; Millican, 2022).

Working from a sustainability perspective, theoretical frameworks such as the ones we have mentioned here offer an important analytical lens to counter the perpetuation of unsustainability and carve out a space to consider alternatives and learn for sustainable futures. Building on Gouthro's (2019) advocacy for educators' engagement with social justice agendas, we argue that education for sustainability must be a practice informed by theory – both in pedagogical approach and in the ontological understanding of the world and sustainability. As adult educators, we must go 'beyond simple tinkering with a very

un-green educational system' and instead endeavour to transform education through radical, theory-driven work (Jickling & Blenkinsop, 2021, p. 58).

Situating our work

The *we* of both the article and the project consists of Filippa and Diana – two adult educators currently working at a Swedish university, teaching adult educators who will later work at folk high schools[3]. Filippa's path to where we are currently situated was through working as a folk high school teacher and later researching the pedagogical practices of these teachers through ethnographic fieldwork and the lens of lifeworld phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012). Diana entered this project bringing with her experience from theatre and drama pedagogies, critical pedagogy and proficiency in translating pedagogical theoretical approaches into teaching practice. Apart from our shared endeavour of teaching at the folk high-school teacher university programme, we were brought together by the conviction that sustainability must become a central issue for adult education research and practice to engage with. Our shared interest in sustainability and its place in the adult education discourse has evolved over the past few years, largely due to the devastating environmental crises unfolding around us. In this, we believe that we resemble many other adult educators and adult education researchers, as our engagement with sustainability is rather recent and we do not identify as or claim to be full-fledged experts in this area. Nevertheless, we saw a need to educate ourselves on such matters and explore how we can help our students start engaging with sustainability as a topic worthy of their serious attention and commitment, as well as inspire them to do the same for the learners they will encounter when teaching in folk high schools.

Education for sustainability is, by necessity, value-based, place-embedded and emancipatory, seeking to help learners develop a desire to connect – to 'actively' be in the world and shape it. From this point of departure, we recently set out to design what we call a 'seed package'[4] that consists of teaching and learning activities aimed at carving out a space where students can learn for sustainable futures (see Figure 1). The learners we had in mind as we designed our 'seed package' were folk high school teacher students. Many of these students already had some teaching experience, and some were involved in social justice or environmental sustainability causes themselves. In relation to the students, our aim was to provide them with an opportunity to develop their understanding and inspiration for how they themselves might engage the learners they teach in learning for sustainability. Since the folk high school teacher students form a diverse group with varying levels of teaching experience and familiarity with sustainability issues, we chose to make the workshop based on our 'seed package' optional. The students could choose between this offer and a more basic general didactics workshop. Furthermore, we were adamant that our students be able to focus on the offered activities and engage as fully as possible. For this reason, we chose not to record, or in other ways collect, data during the teaching sessions. Instead, we focused on our own teaching design work, recording the work sessions in which we developed the 'seed package', as well as our discussions, directly after teaching.

Over the course of six months (March to September 2023), we met once a month to work on our project. In between these collaborative work sessions, we digested, pondered, explored, learned and grew. We deliberately decided to take our time to plan this learning invitation. Though our thoughts on the matter were not as clearly articulated at the beginning as they are now, we have consistently been grounded in the conviction that we must think carefully, not rush and carve deliberatively. Somewhat akin to the artist's

practice of carving, we tried to stay open to discovery – at the beginning, we sort of knew what we wanted to achieve but also knew that the carving process would gradually reveal discrepancies, particularities and potentialities for us to engage with. Our choice to go slow but with purpose (rhythmically, oscillating between thinking and learning alone and coming together to share and create) was grounded in an understanding that the currently established paradigm of modernity is fundamentally exploitative, alienating and unsustainable. Thus, as we engaged in the project, we knew that we wanted to work in a way that broke with implicit capitalist and modernistic assumptions about work, efficiency and quality.

At the time of writing, we have tried out our 'seed package' on three different occasions: first, as a pilot exercise, we tested it ourselves (Spring semester 2023), after which we ran it with two student cohorts (Fall semester 2023 and Spring semester 2024). The reactions and responses from students indicate that our careful, deliberate, theory-informed work was met with appreciation and excitement and was perceived as different from what they are used to encountering in a university context.

The 'seed package'

Figure 1 provides an overview of the seed package, including its stages and theoretical underpinnings. We put together this overview both for our own sakes – to see how theory and practice, as well as parts and whole, relate to each other – and as a handout to give to our students. The side-by-side layout makes it easy to read the design in multiple ways. Read vertically, we can follow the unfolding stages or trace the coherence in theoretical concepts across the stages. Read horizontally, we can connect each step to the theoretical concepts that inform it. We believe that putting theory and practice side-by-side in this manner renders our pedagogical work more explicit and, consequently, makes it possible to have deeper, more meaningful conversations about teaching and pedagogy than if we would have presented only one or the other. For instance, when disagreeing, it is easier to have constructive critical discussions because we can see what the base of the disagreement is – the theoretical underpinning, the activity, the translation of theory into practice, etc. Below, we unpack our seed package explaining our pedagogical ambitions for each stage and how theory has informed our design choices.

Part 1: Individually, at home

The first part in our seed package comprises two stages, as students are introduced to the topic of sustainability and asked to 'walk and think' about what this means for them. These activities are designed to be engaged in individually and at the learners' leisure in their home environment.

Stage 1: Connecting to sustainability

First, we wanted to offer our students a way to approach sustainability through something which they likely could identify with or had experienced in their own lives. As Rasmussen (2021) points out with reference to Oskar Negt, a German philosopher, emancipatory liberal education should help learners' make the connection between personal everyday experiences and broader social themes and patterns. We chose the topic of *climate change*, since it is a symptom and result of unsustainable practices of exploitation that directly affect our lives (albeit in different ways depending on geopolitical and intersectional factors). We asked the students to select and read one chapter from a

Figure 1. Overview of the seed package we designed.

Learning for sustainable futures
A seed package of teaching and learning activities

The aim of this package is to provide the seeds for a pedagogical practice informed by theoretical knowledge from the fields of *adult education research* and *sustainability education research*. The included teaching and learning activities are meant to help learners realise or gauge the responsibility and freedom that we have as persons in the world. In other words, they are meant to emancipate learners to a desire to 'actively' be in the world. On the left-hand side, we describe the teaching and learning activities. A *pathway* of sorts or *use instruction* for the seeds we have designed. You are welcome to use it yourself or draw inspiration from it. On the right-hand side, we have listed the main theoretical assumptions, concepts and key references which have informed our design choices.

Part 1 – individually, at home

Learners are presented with material that highlights some aspect of sustainability issues that is relevant to them. This could be in the form of a text, video, podcast etc. Choose carefully. If possible, offer choices, as this can increase the chance of each participant finding something meaningful for them to latch onto. E.g. a book with thematic chapters where learners are free to choose the theme that most resonates with them.

Using this material as a lens, the learner then goes on a **reflexive wandering** walk **in their surroundings** (in or around their home, workplace, school, grocery store, or any other place that is central to their life space). Ask the learner to **document their reactions and experiences** through photography (video and audio can be offered as alternatives but may be more difficult to process in the next part of the module).

Part 2 – together, on site

Learners share their discoveries and narrate their experiences aided by the documentation (what did you see?). This should be done in small groups, and it is essential that everyone is given space and time to speak without being interrupted or rushed.

Each learner then chooses one image from their portfolio and ponders: what do I dream of for this place? What could it become? What do I wish could be accommodated here? (important to anchor the imagination exercise in the world). Ask learners to **intervene in the chosen image**, i.e. edit the image by pasting stickers, drawing over it, cutting out parts, etc. This can be done digitally (e.g. on the mobile phone that the picture was taken with) or physically (i.e. on printouts of the image).

Next, **learners share their place-grounded future-oriented imaginings** by showing and narrating their creations. This is done in the same small groups as before and it is again important that the exercise is allowed to take time, so everyone may speak and be heard.

Depending on the outcome, you could now capitalise on the collective excitement to maintain momentum. How might we enact, to bring about such imaginings?

Key assumptions, concepts & sources

*Sustainability should be approached **holistically** and with recognition of **complexity**, and **dialectical relationships** (Hamilton, 2017; Lange, 2023). Tracing a theme, phenomenon or example can be a fruitful approach to highlight these aspects.*

*Meaningful learning is **anchored in the participant's lifeworld** (Millenberg, 2022); it becomes powerful when **connected to broader issues** and patterns of society (Rasmussen, 2021; von Kotze & Walters, 2023).*

*Places are pedagogical social constructs which invite certain modes of being-in-the-world and with each other. **Learning to 'read' places for unsustainable patters** of social and ecological domination is part of a **critical pedagogy of place** (Gruenewald, 2001)*

***Reflexive wandering** (Maximović, Joksimović & Utvić, 2020) to change the mode and pace of moving through space; to be in and outside at the same time.*

*When engaging with sustainability, **community** and collaboration are important (Lange, 2023). E.g. for emotional support (Gruenewald, 2003) nuance understanding (Hamilton, 2017), recognise embodied ways of knowing (von Kotze & Walters, 2023) & make democratic transitions (Arias-Maldonado, 2022).*

*Embrace pauses, silence, and gaps – **waiting** as, disruptive and generative experience (Bailey & Suddaby, 2023)*

*Sharing gives us a chance to experience and practice **conviviality** (Martinsson & Mullinari, 2023), **compassion** (Neff, 2011), **empathy** (Nichols, 2011) and **dialogue**.*

*The capacity and capability of **imagining futures** is crucial both for sustainability (Gyberg, Anshelm & Hallström, 2020) and democracy (Rasmussen, 2021) and must be practiced (Jickling & Blenkinsop, 2021).*

***Prefiguration**, i.e. thinking, behaving and being as if that which we'd like to bring about already exists – as if we were already free (Graeber, 2004, 2013). This can be seen as a **chosen margin** or liminal space (hooks, 2014/1990).*

***Collecting and sharing examples** of place-anchored future imaginations can foster community and invite **radical openness** (Gruenewald, 2003, hooks, 2010, Arias-Maldonado, 2022).*

popular science book that illustrates, in the Swedish context, how climate change impacts everyday life today and in the near future and how our social structures, consumption and everyday behaviour, in turn, affect climate patterns and the Earth system (Alestig, 2022). The book consists of a series of thematic chapters which address questions such as how extreme weather affects our health and economy, how we are managing energy supply as fossil fuels are being phased out and how we might defend democracy when the topic of climate change divides people.

Global issues such as ecological degradation and climate change 'can easily become abstractions from the immediacy of the places where we live' (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 633). Talking about incremental degree increases and kilograms of carbon emissions can render crises hard to engage with. For this reason, von Kotze and Walters (2023, p. 28) argue in favour of 'beginning with what people know from their daily lives', as such an approach is more likely to motivate us to act. At the same time, if taken alone, such a translation of unsustainability into local symptoms and effects risks rendering global power relations and exploitation invisible. This is why environmental and sustainability research in recent decades has turned to complex systems approaches, which often try to break with dichotomy and the conception of things as clearly demarcated, stable and separate, in favour of a dialectical understanding of existence. From a learning perspective, however, it can be vastly challenging to engage with such an approach. If everything hangs together in complex ways and is constantly fluctuating, where should you begin to grapple with understanding? One potential entry point to the topic, then, is to choose a phenomenon – a theme, strand or example – and trace it. Alestig's (2022) thematic chapters do just this. For example, tracing fire as a geophysical weather phenomenon which we cannot fully control, Alestig shows how human choices and actions – e.g. the capitalist structures we have put in place and an unreflected valuation of economic profit over everything else – make us particularly vulnerable to natural phenomena and exacerbate their consequences for both people and the planet. We found Alestig's book a good fit for our purpose, as it 'translates' climate change from an abstract, hard-to-engage-with concept, into the local lived context of Swedish everyday life. As such, it invites our students to think about how such phenomena connect to their everyday lives and the places they inhabit.

Another reason for choosing this particular book was *accessibility*, as we wanted to consider and remove potential barriers for learners to engage with the reading material. Written by a climate science journalist, the book is aimed at the general public and does not require expert knowledge on, for example, natural sciences or biophysical phenomena. It is available both as a physical book and in digital written and audio formats, and most libraries as well as commercial audiobook streaming services have it in stock. Though our students are generally affluent enough to purchase course literature, we do have students who lack financial security and we did not want such structural barriers to keep them from participating. Finally, we prioritised accessibility because we wanted our 'seed package' to serve as potential inspiration for our students in designing their own teaching and learning encounters with presumptive folk high school participants, who often suffer from financial insecurity or who could benefit from being able to listen rather than having to read the material.

Stage 2: Connecting to place

Anchoring learning in the participants' lifeworlds contributes to a sense of meaning and deeper engagement (Millenberg, 2023). Both conventional and critical sustainability research promote place as important to be considered when teaching (cf. Gruenewald, 2003; Lange, 2023; Lozano et al., 2022). Building on the concept of *reflexive wandering* introduced by Maksimovic et al. (2020), we encouraged the students to use 'mind and

feet in concert' (Sheridan, 2002). We asked the students to wander in a familiar place, such as their homes, commuting routes or grocery stores, while thinking on the chapter they had read. During this activity, we asked them to pay attention to their experiences – 'what do (you think) you see?' – and to document these by taking photographs or recording short video snippets.

Maksimovic et al. (2020, p. 218) present wandering as a walking practice without a specific destination – as walking *in* a place rather than *through* it – where wanderers merge with their environment, reclaiming its significance through imagination (Maksimovic et al., 2020, p. 221). Thus, wandering challenges the modernistic notions of progress and efficiency by operating at a different pace and in patterns other than what we generally experience in our everyday lives. In our seed package, wandering aims to carve out a space for *intentional deceleration* (Rosa, 2013), allowing learners to slow down enough to perceive and engage more deeply with the places they inhabit and let this experience converse with the reading material from stage 1.

We view places as not just physical locations but as profound centres of experience that shape our understanding of the world and ourselves. Our identities and possibilities are intertwined with the places we occupy, and this relationship is multidirectional, as people shape places and places shape people (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 621; see also Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012; Relph, 1976). The type and quality of relationships, or the attention we give to places, then becomes significant from this perspective. Turning to the mind, we hoped to provoke *reflexivity* in our students – being present in a place while simultaneously viewing the experience from outside. Unlike introspection or turning inward while thinking, reflexivity requires the linking of the mind and feet and is made possible by our bodies. Bodies, then, are essential for 'experiential and affective connections with others and the environment' (Pisters et al., 2019, p. 4), and we learn *through* their physicality.

Part 2: Together, on site

Individual learning and engagement with sustainability are important but far from enough (Gyberg et al., 2020). *Community building* and *collective engagement* with such issues are paramount for many reasons, from providing *emotional support* (Gruenewald, 2003) and promoting a more *nuanced understanding* of the topic (Hamilton, 2017) to recognising *embodied ways of knowing* (von Kotze & Walters, 2023) and finding *democratic ways of moving forward* (Arias-Maldonado, 2022). In this second part of our 'seed package', we wanted the students to engage with each other – to come together by sharing their experiences and to find inspiration and see the potential for agency by imagining futures.

(Un)sustainability – especially when engaged with in relation to our own personal lives – often evokes strong emotional responses such as anxiety, insecurity and shame (Ojala et al., 2021; Pihkala, 2022). Furthermore, it is not always easy to engage constructively with emotions and enact critical pedagogies in the context of higher education. In part, this is due to organisational parameters and the physical spaces of campus and classrooms, as well as due to sociocultural aspects such as students' and teachers' implicit assumptions of what happens (and should happen) in class.

To carve out a space for critical engagement and cultivate a safe environment for vulnerable sharing, we started with a *warm-up exercise* (cf. Tilley, 2023). We chose the rose/bud/thorn prompt, which we learned from colleagues during a workshop on transformative listening (cf. Anderson Sathe et al., 2022). In essence, we asked everyone in the group to give voice to one emotion, thought or experience which they brought with

them into our shared space – something joyous or which they felt gratitude for (a 'rose'); something painful (a 'thorn') or some budding potential which is on the brink of happening and which they might view with anticipation. For the participants, the exercise leaves room to choose one's engagement, from sharing deeply affective concerns to small things such as appreciation for mundane encounters or minor irritations presently experienced. For us as educators, this helps us identify potential tensions or issues which might need to be resolved before moving on to the main activity. Last and most importantly, such exercises create presence and allow us to attune ourselves to each other, rendering us open to dialogue by seeing and hearing each other. They invite compassion and self-compassion, which help us feel connected to ourselves and others (Neff, 2011) and have been shown to be effective in promoting pro-environmental values, intentions and behaviours (Pisters et al., 2019).

Stage 3: Connecting with each other

Once warmed up and open to dialogue, we wanted the students to share and, consequently, be confronted with the emotions and embodied experiences elicited by the realization that life conditions in Sweden and the world are irreversibly changing. We asked the students to show their images and recount their reflexive wandering experiences and the discoveries they made during these experiences. This step involved acknowledging the challenges our students had been confronted with during stage 2 at home and reflecting on the practical implications of climate change for all of us present in the room.

We chose the medium of *images* as a sharing aid because images have the capacity to convey stories and can help us connect to each other by providing glimpses into each other's living spaces. Seeing someone's kitchen wall or the park they traverse on their way to work each Monday can strengthen the perception of the speaker as a whole person. Glimpsing each other's living spaces in this way also means that we are not reduced to projecting our own assumptions and imaginations onto the speaker. This can help drive home the message that, while we share in the common plight of our current planetary crises, we are not equally affected or positioned to respond. The act of sharing can thus be said to open a window or construct a bridge between lifeworlds and contribute to shaping a space of togetherness *in* the classroom which simultaneously stretches beyond the physical space of the classroom. Considering Rosa's (2013) argument that our lives are increasingly becoming disjunctive and episodic, it felt right to do something to link our classroom activities to our home environments. Here, we have included our own visual documentations as an example of what this can look like (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. The authors' photo documentations of their reflexive wanderings, shared with each other while trying out the proposed teaching and learning activities.

Diana's wondering reflections

Filippa's wondering reflections

In this stage, we *took our time*, giving each student the space they needed to tell their story and share the pictures or short videos they had recorded. We knew that this sharing process could lead to moments of silence, as students can find it difficult to speak about their experiences and emotions, and practical issues, such as how to share one's photos so that everyone in the room can see them, can arise and must be resolved. Instead of letting this stress us, we chose to embrace spontaneous moments of silence. *Waiting* is an activity and experience which can be both frustrating and productive. As a temporal experience, waiting has the potential to create 'moments where time can be "undone" and "reclaimed"' (Bailey & Suddaby, 2023, p. 1033) as a space to experience being human together rather than focusing on chronological time and rushing forward.

Waking up to the meaning and implications of the Anthropocene can be tough and can elicit multifaceted, complex reactions. Tension and conflict may, therefore, easily arise as 'the hydra-headed monster of fear, distrust, and contentiousness [rears] its head, sowing dissent in a seemingly zero-sum game' (Thomas, 2022, p. 5). The act of sharing and being vulnerable together, however, can open a space to 'sit with the trouble' and practice *conviviality*, or an ethic of care (Martinsson & Mulinari, 2023), as well as the type of *dialogue* which is central to critical adult education. From a psychological perspective, Neff (2011) shows that *compassion* and *self-compassion* help us feel connected to ourselves and others, while Nicholls (2011) argues that, pedagogically and politically, *empathy* invites us to stand with others and make the dismantling of oppression a common cause. Critically, empathy and compassion are competences which must be trained and practised, not only understood, and accepted on an intellectual level. Therefore, providing students with opportunities to practise conviviality, dialogue, empathy and compassion is essential from the perspective of education for sustainability.

A further crucial competency to train is the ability to dream or imagine possible futures that would be worth pursuing. We turn to this in the next step.

Stage 4: Connecting to sustainable futures

Societal transformation towards sustainable futures requires imagination and creativity (Glăveanu, 2017; Moore & Milkoreit, 2020; Rasmussen, 2021). Therefore, in this stage, we wanted to turn our gazes to the future and imagine sustainable alternatives. Artistic expression is a particularly powerful tool for inviting and practising creativity, not least

when developing social consciousness and imagining social change (cf. Ammentorp, 2007; von Kotze, 2019). Again, inspired by Maksimovic et al. (2020), we devised a creative activity in which we asked the students to edit one of the photographs from their reflexive wandering. We invited them to look at their chosen picture and contemplate 'What are my dreams and wishes for this place?'. We then asked them to intervene in the image of the present and change it – to draw over it, add stickers or clippings as they saw fit – so that it would represent their envisioned place-based dreams and wishes. We included our own place-anchored dreams as an example of what this can look like (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. The authors' edited photos, shared with each other while trying out the teaching and learning activities. Diana edited her image on her computer using Microsoft Paint and by inserting images found through google image search. Filippa edited her photo on her phone by using the phone's picture editing function.

Diana's place-anchored future imagining

Filippa's place-anchored future imagining

Encouraging the participants to imagine and wish was intended to create a space for the realisation that there exist multiple pathways forward. By *intervening in places* and *re-imagining them*, we acknowledged their socially constructed nature and inherent malleability without denying their biophysical properties. This invited hope and a willingness to change and could expand our capacity to think radically about different futures. Exploring contrasting perspectives and actively seeking out diverse ideas and influences beyond our immediate cultural contexts can also enhance our creative, imaginative capacity (Jickling & Blenkinsop, 2021).

Anchoring future imaginations in the present draws attention to the fact that all potential futures originate in the present and what is being done now (Sharpe et al., 2016). To convey this, we started with images representing existing places and encouraged the students to dream 'on top of' them. The process of aesthetic creation by building on top of an image of the place-as-is invites attention to detail and to 'step into' the place-as-it-could-be. Establishing a connection between what-is and what-could-be is important because 'imagining and enacting are paired: it doesn't do us much good to invent fantastic new worlds if we can't see ourselves … being in them' (Jickling & Blenkinsop, 2021, p. 59).

While our *capacity for imagining futures* is crucial for both sustainability (Gyberg et al., 2020) and democracy (Rasmussen, 2021), it can also be challenging. As modern subjects, we are generally not accustomed to such practices, nor to 'sitting with the trouble' and vulnerability that creative processes elicit (Pisters et al., 2019). Therefore, providing students with opportunities to practice and become accustomed to imagining

their futures is important. A further challenge is that imagination is not boundless but rather constrained by our cultural, experiential and creative histories (Jickling & Blenkinsop, 2021, p. 58). Put simply, we become imaginatively limited to the cultural and experiential realities of our lifeworlds. To move beyond these limitations, we can turn to margins and liminal places. Sought out by choice, margins can be *places of hope* (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 632) that invite a 'radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds' (hooks, 1990/2014, p. 150). In nature, margins, such as the border between forest and meadow, are particularly vibrant, generative places.

Stage 5: Connecting to hope and agency

In this final phase, our endeavour was, again, to come together and share – to invite a sense of a *community of resistance* (hooks, 1990/2014, p. 149). We, therefore, invited students to present and narrate their creations from stage 4. *Voicing one's dreams in front of others* can inspire a sense of empowerment and agency, while *witnessing* those of others can remind us of the differences in both our positions and circumstances and of our shared humanity. Gathering examples of place-anchored transformations in this way can also emphasise that the modernistic notion of *progress as linear, rational and inevitable* is a social construct rather than a self-evident conclusion. Since 'our arrival at this new epoch [the Anthropocene] was not foreordained' (Thomas, 2022, p. 4) and there is more than one possible way to proceed from here, sharing imaginations of potential futures can help make this plurality visible for learners. Each future imaginary dreamt on top of a present actuality also highlights the connection between present choices or actions and the actualisation of possible futures. To perceive agency, it is also helpful to gauge that the future which will become actualised, though not inevitable, nevertheless emerges from the present (Sharpe et al., 2016). Such 'future consciousness' encourages learners to perceive themselves as subjects in the world and thus as capable of acting without assuming a deterministic view of the future.

Additionally, sharing can foster *community* and *hope* – both of which are crucial prerequisites for mobilisation. In relation to sustainability Arias-Maldonado (2022, p. 162) argues that 'in order to facilitate the pivot towards the future, we need a hopeful game plan', and that, without downplaying the seriousness of the situation, we should also encourage each other towards *radical openness* (i.e. towards perceiving the present 'as an opportunity to build a better future for human societies'). Such critical engagement is difficult yet necessary (Gruenewald, 2003; hooks, 2010) and requires room for collaboration (Lange, 2023, p. 223). Echoing hooks (1990/2014), Gruenewald argues that the proponents of sustainability need allies and *communities of resistance* to persist in the prevailing unsustainable system. As educators, we think that we are well-positioned to carve such *homeplaces.*

Teaching for sustainable futures: Take-aways and challenges

In this article, we showed how adult educators can draw on adult education theory to design teaching that *carves out a space for deep, personal and meaningful engagement with sustainability.* Drawing on theory to design teaching is important as it allows educators to gauge the complexity of teaching and make deliberate choices. By drawing on theory, we can argue on how activities that emancipate students to critical awareness and engaged citizenship need to be designed (Gouthro, 2019). At the same time, theory and seed packages like the one we have outlined here are not enough to support the type of education we need. Teaching is also a practice; it means being immersed in the world

and in relationships with others, and therefore, also requires a *capacity for imagination* and *practical wisdom* (Tyson, 2016).

Since unsustainability is intertwined with conceptualisations of time and pace (Rosa, 2013), we believe that adult educators must pay particular attention to these dimensions both in relation to teaching preparation and to the temporalities of students' learning experiences (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Swirski & Simpson, 2012). A key feature of our work was *paying attention to time* – making time and taking the time to think on what our students' most pressing needs might be; to read and reflect on the great challenges of our present and how they might be tackled and to meet, talk about and create activities which are worth the effort – both for us to spend time on carving and for our students to engage with. Our commitment to slowing down and taking time should, however, not be read as an endorsement of slowness as an antidote to modernity and unsustainability. As Rosa (2013) and Vostal (2019) point out, slowing down can be used to serve capitalism and the project of modernity if commodified, as in the case of relaxing retreats aimed at allowing us to accelerate more effectively after the break. Furthermore, while slowness can be radical, it is also a defining feature of parochialism and other oppressive political projects (Vostal, 2019). Even on an individual, experiential level, it would be highly excluding to assume that slow is (always) more enjoyable or conductive to learning than fast, or that the pace at which exploitation and unsustainability affect us is the same for everyone everywhere (Thomas, 2022). In short, neither acceleration nor slowdown is implicitly desirable. Instead, their necessity should be interrogated as a contextually framed question of fit. In our teaching design, we chose to provide learners with opportunities to slow down not as an end goal but rather as a necessary prerequisite for thinking and relinking, having identified speed as a barrier to this for our learners.

In this article, we argue that teaching for sustainable futures requires us to *pay attention to place.* As adult educators engaged in academic settings, we also have to consider how higher education contributes (or could and should contribute) to the production of (un)sustainable places and (un)just power relationships. To teach for sustainable futures, educators in university contexts must seek to emancipate students to a critical awareness of place, in the sense of 'learning to listen to what places are telling us – and to respond as informed, engaged citizens' (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 645). To facilitate and encourage such connections, we think it is necessary to *move education outside* – outside the classroom, the campus, the semester, the timetable and our comfort zones. Such re-location, re-rooting and re-pacing can help un-fragment our episodic existence and create meaningful connections between and within the places we inhabit, with the people we share our spaces with, with ourselves and with issues and values worth our attention. It can also help us bring attention to gaps and invite engagement with margins and transitory places to develop our imagination and expand our horizons.

We recognise that this is an ambitious project. As with any creative work, we encountered moments of hesitation, uncertainty and setbacks, as well as sparks of clarity and inspiration. We read research from (for us) foreign academic fields and engaged with new theories, discussing and trying them out to see if they would fit together and whether they could contribute to furthering our project. Working together allowed us to engage in dialogue and act as critical friends. We compared and shared our own previous teaching experiences and drew on these to think together about what activities would be appropriate and engaging for our students. We considered how our teaching offer might be received by potential students, what could go wrong or what 'failure' might look like and how we would like to respond if any of these scenarios arose during teaching. These conversations were both stimulating and challenging. While we believe that our collaborative approach to designing teaching activities resulted in a high-quality 'seed

package', we also acknowledge that no teaching is perfect and that what worked for us (this time) will not necessarily be successful in other situations. Learning is a lived process that is co-experienced by those involved, embedded in place, entangled and messy. As educators, we see it as our role to carve out spaces that invite learners to grow in directions that are emancipatory and liberating. Whether such learning actually occurs is another question. Learners will engage, perceive and experience such spaces in various ways, depending, for example, on who they are, how they are situated and what their own learning agendas are. The 'seed package' we present here will work better for some learners than others and might not be a good fit for adult learners in other contexts.

Both design teaching for sustainable futures and writing about it theoretically are challenging. In our work, we brought in strands from environmental research, sociology, pedagogy, political science and art and tried to put theory and practice in conversation with each other. Writing this article, we had to balance comprehensiveness and complexity and could, therefore, not delve deeply into any single aspect. Nevertheless, we tried to stay true to our understanding of sustainability as both hyper-complex and essential. Additionally, we recognise that the academic institutions we are embedded in, as well as the stories and language which surround us in our everyday lives, stifle and limit our imaginaries. To counter the hegemonies of our own contexts, we carefully considered our own *modes of engagement* with time, place and meaningfulness and how these shape our work, as we know that imaginative capacity *can* be expanded and agency *is* possible. We adopted small practices such as checking in with each other regularly to make sure we were staying mindful of what mattered to us, to support each other through tough days and to remind each other to stay patient and work deliberatively while focusing on meaningful work.

Concluding thoughts

Responding to the wicked unsustainability of the present requires new thinking in terms of both scale and modality. The growing awareness of our current situation challenges established world views such as those promoted by modernity. The required paradigmatic shifts can either be dreaded or embraced as an opportunity to dream seriously and work towards better, more liveable futures. Here, we tried to show how adult educators can use theory to reimagine education beyond the confines of modernity, creating space for the participants to feel more deeply connected to knowledge, values, people and the planet.

As we navigate this 'era of awakening', we have the responsibility to act (Arias-Maldonado, 2022). Despite the seriousness of the socioecological crisis, all is not yet lost. Reviewing scholarly literature on sustainability transformations and the democracy–environment nexus published between 2011 and 2021, Pickering et al. (2022) find substantial evidence that societal transformation for sustainable futures can be achieved through democratic processes and citizen engagement. This presents us with an ethical imperative to act. Universities cannot exempt themselves from this duty. As academics, adult educators and human beings alive today, it is our responsibility to both sit with the trouble and be hopeful, creative and brave.

Notes

1   We would like to extend our gratitude to Silke Schreiber-Barsch and the two anonymous reviewers for their thorough and helpful comments on this submission.

2   Sustainability is a slippery concept that can mean many things – from business as usual with an added care for the environment to a paradigmatically different way of seeing and being in the world,

where social and ecological justice are foundational (cf Engelman, 2013; Lange, 2023). We define sustainability as liveability or a commitment to sustaining life on Earth (including human life) indefinitely (Lange, 2023).

3   Folk high schools are one of several adult education institutions in the Swedish context. Originating in social movements in the 19th century, they skirt the line of formal and independent education. Further, this adult education institution encompasses a high level of diversity both pedagogically and content wise (cf. Lövgren & Nordvall, 2017). Adult participants can enrol in compensatory basic level programmes and/or a broad range of specialised civic, arts and vocational courses. Some folk-high schools are in rural areas and offer lodging, while others operate in urban locations. While there is a strong Bildung and democracy ethos in the Swedish folk high school context, this institution also includes prestigious, highly selective art programmes.

4   We chose the term 'seed package' to refer to the education offer we designed. Metaphorically the term suggests that this is a cohesive collection of instructions designed to support a specific pedagogical agenda – a package – but that it also must be translated and adapted depending on the context. Further, we chose this metaphor to convey that this is an example of a starting point rather than the full 'solution' to carving out a space for emancipation and learning for sustainable futures.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship or publication of this article.

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The gut as teacher: Learning from our bodies

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Abstract

This paper reports on a short course for working class people, in Cape Town, South Africa. It outlines how a 'gut pedagogy', that is, a practice of teaching through the body that takes the digestive system as 'teacher', is the starting point for 'reading the world'. The journey of food as life and energy-giving substances from the world, through the body, back into the world, illustrates how systems are entangled with each other. The gut pedagogy is deliberately centred within a part of the body that mediates between inside and outside, yet is rarely spoken about. The practice is rooted firmly within feminist popular education that re-connects what has been separated – body and mind, humans and more-than-humans, the gut and the brain. Feminist practice respects and surfaces different ways of knowing, both rational and gut instinct. The paper shows that we can learn from our bodies, if we listen: about health, about the interconnectedness of all life, about the need to respect life and work together to maintain our planet.

Keywords: gut, ecofeminism, popular education, systems, interconnectedness

Introduction

'You can't trust anyone. We no longer have community!'(Margo September, 15 April, 2024). This was the comment of a course participant in response to a socio-drama depicting dishonesty and theft in a poor community, performed by others in her class. The play was in response to the question 'what big concerns do you have about starting your small enterprise?' as part of a skills training course that focused on 'reading the world'. Within their homes, people are evermore asked to juggle the demands of everyday survival, confronted with too little of everything, from nutritious food to energy, water and cash (Joubert, 2018). When they step outside, safety and security are threatened by gang violence, drugged youth desperate for the next 'hit', and jealousy and gossip that

thrives on others' misery. Women and youth, in particular, are targets, as neighbourhoods are described as war-zones. This is the context in which we run adult education classes for working class people in poor areas of Cape Town, South Africa, where the unemployment rate reaches 40 % and more, in some areas.

Communities that are torn apart do not respect life. In *Down to Earth,* Latour (2018) had warned about the perversity of modernity that:

> by ridiculing the notion of tradition as archaic, it precluded any form of transmission, inheritance, or revival, and thus of transformation – in short of engendering. And this is true for the education of human offspring as well as for landscapes, animals, governments, or divinities. (Latour, 2018, p. 88)

Women's relations to nature as a source of nutrition and nurture hold important lessons towards survival of the planet (Kothari et al., 2019; Lange, 2023). Other ways of knowing, including the deleted and excluded knowledges of colonized indigenous peoples, as a source of wisdom for living sustainably in and with nature, are forgotten or dismissed (Brody, 2000). Part of such knowledges is the recognition that, like animals, we live in a body – and bodies have needs that can only be met if they are fed nutritiously and are maintained healthily. Challenger (2021) insists people need to become fully embodied animals:

> Problems flow from the notion that we are split between a superior human half, and the inferior, mortal body of an animal. In short, we have come to believe that our bodies and their feelings are a lesser kind of existence. (Challenger, 2021, p. 21)

If bodies are denied, abdomens are totally excluded. In Western culture, social taboos have prohibited conversations about 'the downstairs' of bodies. The most neglected part of our bodies is the abdomen – in particular, women's pelvic area, and the digestive system. A cartoon illustrates this well: A doctor sits behind a desk, asking his woman patient: 'have you been examined downstairs?'. She responds promptly, 'no, I came straight up'. Women have not been encouraged to get to know their 'downstairs' and, in our context, are generally uncomfortable to speak about 'their private parts'. As Barnacle (2009, p. 23) says, 'The body has tended to have a pejorative status within western thought. This is due, not in small part, to an ongoing association with the female gender.' The multitude of words invented to refer to both sexual organs and excrement rather than naming them, are testimony to this discomfort.

This paper is a critical reflection on attempts to develop a practice of teaching through the body with the gut / intestinal system as teacher. Learning from the gut offers an introduction to the workings of a system, exemplary for the intricate interconnectedness of all systems. The 'gut pedagogy' was a gateway to 'reading the world' (Freire, 1972) to both find and make a place in it, and ways in which individuals can collectively make changes towards a mutually beneficial and sustainable alternative. The underlying strong message, practiced in this learning process, is that reciprocal respect and cooperation are essential to survival – both in terms of our health and that of the planet.

The paper begins with an outline of the various points of entry to working with/through the gut. It situates the 'gut pedagogy' firmly within feminist popular education as an embodied practice of teaching that respects and surfaces different ways of knowing, including paying attention to gut instincts. It then moves to a brief description of an adult education skills training course that was the context of teaching working class women and men to 'read the world' as a crucial part of learning a skill. This is followed by a case study of teaching through the gut, which I refer to as 'gut pedagogy'. The

relation of brain and gut is reflected in the interplay of rational discourse and emotional knowing within the material body. The journey of food as energy-giving substances through the body illustrates the interconnectedness of different parts of a system. The discussion leads to what Andreotti (Decolonial Futures Collective, 2023) calls 'probiotic education' – an education that enriches understandings of the world, akin to probiotics strengthening and supporting the microbiome in the gut.

From experience to idea: the making of a pedagogy

There were various routes into teaching through the gut and the making of the pedagogy. In the past, I have been involved in various education programmes on nutrition and health with mainly rural and working-class women. This work had inducted me into the importance of food production, preparation and consumption, and the impact of so-called development programmes that promote endless growth in line with economic imperatives, to the peril of local practices. Working in education with often multiply traumatised people, the idea of introducing a health component focused on both mental health and the physical body was inviting. If treated with respect, the gut sustains life in the same way as nature sustains the habitats of living beings. As an extremely sensitive organ, the gut system recoils from violence and stress and from eating habits that offer no nourishment - much in the same way as ecological systems respond to violence and trauma that damage its interconnected pathways and mycelial relations of support and care. 'Health is a continuum from the biodiversity in the soil, of our plants and in our gut microbiome' (Shiva, 2021, p. 13).

The digestive system is at the centre of energy production and overall health. It suggested itself as an interesting interdisciplinary entry point into dialogue on binaries, the politics of interrelated systems, including ecosystems, on gender and inequality, on the challenge to overcome all kinds of separations. Reading Enders' (2015), *Gut. The inside story of our bodies most underrated organ* introduced me to the fascinating story of life within the body and the fact that people only take note of their guts when they have a strong 'gut feeling', mostly dismissed as unreliable, or if they have digestive trouble. The division into rational knowledge associated with the brain (and men), and intuitive knowledge communicated by the gut (ascribed to women) became symptomatic of binary thinking. As a feminist educator I build on the belief that the subject of knowledge is never just an individual in some abstract context, but always an individual in a particular social situation within broader dynamics.

The strong relations between gut and brain, physical and mental health hold many epistemological and ontological lessons. The life and death of trillions of microbes within the digestive system keep us in good health or sickness and provide us with the energy to act. Thus, I thought that the gut might offer an illustration of the way we currently produce and consume to sustain or threaten life and living – both ours, and that of the planet in times of heightened risk. This raised the question: How could we use the 'gut' as an analytical tool to learn to 'read the world'?

Previously, Shirley Walters and I had suggested 'that the elements that need to be interrogated through praxis in an ecofeminist curriculum are those which relate to participants' lives in immediate ways, like food security and water.' (Walters & von Kotze, 2021) Current processes of food production and consumption, especially in vulnerable regions, are unsustainable and impact the health of people as much as the land. We proposed that focusing on what we eat and drink, food systems and food insecurity, nutritional health and hunger would be a good starting point for radical popular education, as the biggest impact of the climate crisis is and will be on agricultural and food systems,

(von Kotze & Walters, 2023; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2022). Our suggestion was reinforced by Cock (2007) and Ghosh (2024) who pointed out that beginning with what people know from their daily lives can light a spark about climate justice easier than talking about 'carbon emissions'. The idea of building a learning session on the gut system was born.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical roots of this pedagogy are twofold: firstly, radical feminist popular education, secondly, ecofeminism. Both have the common denominator of an explicit material rooting, working from the premise that learning and knowledge production is embodied, as in 'My gut feeling is that…', 'I feel gutted that…or 'I feel gutsy enough to try this out!'.

Firstly, radical or popular education, as I use the term, is underpinned by the principles that it is rooted in the real interests and struggles of people, overtly political and critical of the status quo, and committed to radical systemic change (Martin, 1999). This is education for social mobilization, rather than social mobility (von Kotze et al., 2016) and it addresses the collective, rather than the individual. In this process, dialogue is the foundation for both learning and knowing. It is also the means to unearth or resurface other knowledges, including indigenous knowledge. Building consciousness is a process of re-knowing, that is, going back to something prior, an existing awareness, and re-experiencing it a-new. For this to happen, the social relations of power in the room are altered towards respectful subject to subject relations and a deliberate and purposeful commitment to interdependence and reciprocity as values and outcomes. The action component of praxis is 'inbuilt' into the process of learning. The 'really useful knowledge' grows out of participants' everyday struggles to meet life needs and protect the integrity of ethical reproductive work. It is created when individuals and groups begin to reflect upon their experience with each other in ways that lead to greater insight and understanding, and gets linked to action strategies for bringing about changes (Thompson, 2000).

Drawing on Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1972) especially the production and use of 'codes' as starting points for learning 'to read the world', radical feminist popular education (FPE) begins with the here and now of people and conditions, rather than abstracting from the contradictions and tensions that confront them. FPE embraces the physical body as part of the knowing, meaning-making subject. Matter itself actively shapes and interacts with the world.

FPE includes a long history of the discourse on the body. Michelson (1998) sought to reconnect the dis-membered body to 'knowledge as a product of corporeally and emotionally grounded human life' (p. 217). The split between body and mind, in which the inferior body is dis-membered, severed from the superior mind, reduces people to just thinking beings is a notion that elevates 'rational' humans above 'instinctual' animals. Like Rich (1976), Michelson names the victory of male institutionalised medicine over female traditions of community-based healing as an example of an explicit power move on the (female) body as a site of knowledge. Physically, the body is always clearly located within specific tensions, contradictions and dynamics of space and time. And so, 'the act of remembering mind and body is always also an act of self-location in a world in which knowing subjects are real human beings and in which each of us has important things at stake in the creation of one kind of world rather than another' (Michelson, 1998, p. 229). In her study *Gender, Experience and Knowledge* (2015), Michelson argued clearly how:

> In its insistence that all knowledge is rooted in concrete, historical subject positions, feminist theory, in effect, has feminised the human knower, re-grounding authority in experience and positioning partiality and locatedness rather than abstract universality as the basis for credible knowledge claims. (Michelson, 2015, p. 59)

Mind, body and senses – what we called the head, hand and heart – work together to receive and make sense of messages; knowledge is contextual and embodied. Education often takes place under precarious conditions, as a 'pedagogy of contingency' (von Kotze, 2013), that is, a pedagogy that disrupts the notion of continuity and stability as it is constantly produced and re-produced in relation to changing dynamics. Like the economy in which it operates, it is open to the unforeseen emergence of what might happen and so it seeks to respond assertively to the conditions that people seek to improve or change. Curricula that become in the here and now of particular circumstances, could be described as contingent in that they respond to high-risk dynamics. Working with groups of working class women whose livelihood insecurities and threats of gender-based violence dictate flexible education sessions, take place in available spaces and places not specifically defined as educational, rely on cheap, available resources, and are often innovative and creative.

Secondly, Readings on ecofeminism and the separation of nature from humans, as theorised by Lange (2023) and Salleh (2017) were important markers in developing the gut pedagogy. Salleh's materialist ecofeminism is compelling, as she combines a 'feminist, decolonial and socialist response to the 21st century ecological breakdown' (Salleh, 2017). Salleh (as cited in in Moreno, 2023) does not believe crises can be addressed without also rejecting capitalism and if you look underneath capitalism, you find patriarchy:

> In the patriarchal-colonial-capitalist system the originary and most ancient form of power is men's domination over women. Then comes colonization invading the land and taking the resources of other peoples. Finally, the capitalist economic form emerges from colonization and is relatively modern, only a few hundred years old. It is important to see these three systems as concurrent, entangled and mutually reinforcing systems. Capitalism itself would not work without patriarchal energies driving it. These energies are learned and embodied in men and acted out in social and economic practices. Looking at the three systems, each has several levels – from the unconscious to everyday actions, to political structures, to ideology. (Moreno, 2023, para. 10)

While the discourse on the body continues to proliferate in feminist inquiry, the body itself is rarely afforded more than a very limited agency. Writing about 'gut instinct', Barnacle (2009) points out that:

> The gut, like the psychological sphere, interacts directly with the outside world: the former in the formation of relations with others, and through that the self, and the latter as a canal that passes all the way through the body, from mouth to anus, in the ingestion, digestion and excretion of food. The gut is actually an exterior passage through the body, allowing the outside world to literally pass right through us. The role of the gut in mediating between inside and outside parallels that of the psyche. But whereas we think of the psyche as dynamically involved in the development and maintenance of one's relations with others and the world, the gut rarely gets attributed such a role. (Barnacle, 2009, p. 25)

This relationship between body and world, reflected in the interaction between human/animal and the dynamics and pressures of material social, economic, political reality, suggests that the gut is actively engaged with the world, physically and psychologically. The exact nature of this interaction in the process of knowledge construction would make a fascinating study, that goes beyond this article. However,

Barnacle (2009) draws attention to how teaching and learning through the gut can speak to an embodied way of knowing that is intersectional, drawing on health sciences, ecological studies, educational theory, in particular popular education, and ecofeminism.

Pedagogy, as the practice of teaching, and curriculum reflect each other, as they often do in radical FPE. The 'gut pedagogy' is an emergent curriculum, focused on the functions and workings of the gut as a primary source of learning, while drawing parallels to other systems. There is a coherence between the what and the how of the pedagogy, strongly informed by purpose.

Case study: learning to read the world

The following is a short case study of the emergence of the 'gut pedagogy' in action. I present this case study as an embedded activist facilitator, testing the idea of the 'gut pedagogy' in the context of a short course for unemployed working class people in a poor area of Cape Town. I offer a thick description of experimentation with the process and include the voices of participants as they reflected on their experience. This course ended with reflective reviews involving participants, and the production of mind-maps that situate the gut pedagogy within the context of other socio-economic, political themes. This was followed by group interviews with participants and my co-facilitator, Vanessa Reynolds, the coordinator of the hosting organisation.

Context

Many doors lead off the central space on the first floor of an old building in the economic heartland of a working-class area. It is rented by The Women's Circle (TWC), a women's NGO that operates in different townships of Cape Town. The doors lead to various rooms used for small enterprises, namely hairdressing / nailcare, sewing, handiman/handiwomen and T-shirt design. A cook and baker in the kitchen prepares nutritious food at low cost. There are numerous small tables and chairs arranged in the multi-purpose space. TWC has taken great care to make the space homely – the women who come here must feel safe and supported, as this is a shelter, a place for multiple learnings, conviviality, togetherness. It is a collection point for / of courageous women who refuse to submit to poverty and misery, and a 'rehearsal' space for practicing building relationships towards collective action.

'Reading the world' is a 10 week course of two hours each, repeated for three groups, to accompany a 3 month skills training project attended by selected women and men who hope to embark on self-employment enterprises. Taking our cue from Paulo Freire, we have named the course 'Reading the World', to clearly indicate the purpose: to critically examine the power dynamics and interests that direct socio-economic interests, pressures and contradictions. For example, tracing fashions back to their origins further afield and charting competitive initiatives within neighbourhoods may avert embarking on business directions that are doomed to fail. Importantly, course participants are invited to make sense of the interconnectedness of institutions and systems. In the process of analysing existing and potential risks, participants relate these to broader interests and consider how 'power with' through cooperative initiatives may strengthen their proposed enterprises. Each day, there are 16 people, a mix of old and young, women and men, isiXhosa and Afrikaans speaking. The majority are women some of whom live in a woman's shelter and feel shy to interact with others. Many are on medication for depression or mental disorder. All share a history of traumatic experiences due to the legacies of Apartheid, unemployment and poverty, local socio-political strife, gender-based violence and gang

related territorial wars. What brings them together is the desire to learn one or more of the skills on offer, and to start a self-employment project.

From the start, we emphasise cooperation, and fun. Transitive solidarity, as defined by Gaztambide-Fernandez (2012) denotes people entering a relationship of active engagement with others to achieve a set aim. It is as important for people to build bonds of trust and to support each other, as it is to generate a feeling of being part-of, of belonging. 'Reading the world' has the explicit aim to connect participants in order to forge transitive solidarity in what is perceived to be a hostile world. Laughter is a great way to break the tensions that participants bring with them, and physical exercises, games and various small performances create a playful atmosphere. Risk-taking as learners is encouraged as much as safe keeping, and TWC facilitators attempt to take care of both.

The first session is introductory: to begin to establish a basis of trust and cooperation and to signal the very participatory nature of the course. Trust building is not a linear process but takes time and each session will include explicit exercises and reflections. The second asks participants to situate themselves in their communities: they draw 'mobility maps' of their neighbourhoods and identify 'hubs' of particular activities, threats and risks and social services. The third session is focused on the gut, where we 'map' the route of food from the outside through the body, and back outside and study the microbiome, as described below. This session is followed by tracing and comparing the commercial food system with food sovereignty through community gardens. Fifth: Communication skills, involves various forms of respectfully interacting with others, by including considerations of culture, language, gender. Basic research skills, problem-posing and analytical skills make up the rest of the course. All the way through, insights are related to and made relevant for the hairdressing, sewing and handiwork courses. Explorations of power, gender, class are woven through, as are repeated references to the gut as a micro-ecological system exemplary of other systems. In the final session participants collectively produce mind-maps that illustrate how they have made sense of the course and relate the different components to each other and the skills training.

What follows is a detailed description of the process of the 'gut system' session. I have included discussion points and interpretations as they are an inseparable part of the gut pedagogy itself: this is not a lecturing process, but a weaving of action and reflection. There is a constant learning spiral of questioning what happened (What?), interpreting and making sense of it (So what?), possibly adding information to deepen the examination, and drawing tentative conclusions towards action (Now what?).

Gut pedagogy in action

What:

I announce the day's topic: 'the gut' and ask for translations into other languages represented in the room. I acknowledge the uneasiness and unfamiliarity of exploring something situated in the 'downstairs' part of our bodies and draw attention to this being a collective and not just individual discomfort: irrespective of our differences, we have all been socialised into regarding the lower abdomen as 'taboo'. There is a lot of uneasy laughter especially as we reach agreement about terminology: 'How shall we refer to our waste, our faeces?'.

When the laughter has died down, I distribute pieces of fruit and invite participants to eat them very slowly, mindfully, consciously, and follow the journey of the fruit through the body, pointing out and naming each organ and its function, while making a

crude drawing on flipchart, as illustration. The process is useful as it demonstrates existing knowledge but also myths and gaps in understanding biological digestion.

I introduce the workings of the trillions of bacteria, viruses and fungi, collectively known as the microbiome. There are more bacterial cells than human cells in a body. The food people eat affects the diversity of the gut bacteria, and since bacteria control how the immune system works, this diversity is important (Enders, 2015). I list some of the main functions of the gut microbiome. Although there is no definite proof, there are up to 1,000 species of bacteria in the human gut microbiome, and each of them plays a different role in the body. The workings of the gut biomes, the trillions of bacteria, viruses and fungi keep the immune system, heart, weight and many other aspects of health, both physical and mental, in order. The microbiota also support the regulation of brain function. As Challenger (2021) reports, researchers have shown 'a high occurrence of gastrointestinal symptoms among those with autism spectrum disorders' (p. 137).

So what?

A question about gut disorders opens the session to stories about diarrhoea and constipation, and yes, this must be related to bad water or food ingested, or to infections. The connection to the importance of wholesome food and clean water, to sanitary living and working conditions is clear. Participants begin to make links to socio-economic conditions and influences outside the body: environmental factors, including food habits, impact individual behaviour. Does this mean the gut microbiome tells a story about inequality? How does the diversity of microorganisms in the gut reflect food systems and access and affordability within the apartheid city?

A participant draws on personal experience to illustrate how she understands the connection of gut and brain: she knows when she is depressed because she gets diarrhoea; another agrees: 'When I'm stressed, I can't go to the toilet.' Participants share experiences that illustrate the gut-brain connection; they relate numerous stories of how the brain and gut communicate with each other. They affirm what they have heard: Keeping a healthy gut is key to overall well-being.

Depression and trauma are as much a part of daily life, as poverty. There is a clear link between the gut and the brain. Increasingly, research suggests that the gut microbiome affects the central nervous system, which controls brain function, and vice versa. A short input explains that the 'little brain' is two thin layers of more than 100 million nerve cells lining our gastrointestinal tract from oesophagus to rectum. Mayer (2018) and Enders (2015) list numerous ways in which brain and gut are connected: certain species of bacteria can help produce chemicals in the brain called neurotransmitters; serotonin is an antidepressant neurotransmitter that is mostly made in the gut; people with various psychological disorders have different species of bacteria in their guts, compared to healthy people. This suggests that the gut microbiome may affect brain health, borne out by psychologist Gabor Mate (as cited in Jay Shetty Podcast, 2023) who describes the 'cognitive dissonance' between the dominant narrative in everyday life (what is perceived as normal), and actual experiences, between what we are told, and what we feel, sense, think in our hearts and bodies. He posits that people ignore 'gut feelings' as irrelevant or misleading, and often this, he argues, leads to trauma, which is damaging to our wellbeing.

Playfully, we engage the imagination as I ask: Does the process of digestion have certain similarities to learning, to the processing of information? How so? Participants unpack the actions involved in reflection and relate these to the processing of food particles in the gut. What if food particles were concepts and ideas: how do we break

them apart into constituent elements, add more information, like food, and mix it up with previous data? There is reference to mindfulness, the importance of being fully present in a place and time, and participants probe the 'immune system' of the gut by asking how might this be similar to testing the reliability of data?

The session goes beyond words to dramatic and visual representations: Participants mime the faces we pull when we have a 'gut ache' or try to suppress a bout of diarrhoea. Each one draws an imaginary bacteria, virus or fungus, cuts it out and sticks it on the graph, creating a collective image of the biome in the gut, with lines that connect the organ to the brain. Arrows indicate links to the world beyond the biological and psychological body: social, with regards to race and gender, historical, with regards to cultural eating habits, economic, with regards to class and geography. Epistemologically, the image illustrates the diversity of the gut microbiome; pedagogically, participants have contributed to the construction of a visualization of a biological link, the understanding of which is crucial for improved wellbeing.

Now what?

How can this knowledge lead to actions? There are suggestions how to strengthen the microbiota by eating wholesome food. Factors such as unbalanced diet, stress, antibiotic use, or diseases pose threats while a healthy host–microorganism balance is the basis for a gut to perform metabolic and immune functions and prevent disease development. My colleague Vanessa tells the story of how she uses the 'gut pedagogy' to explain and illustrate the interrelatedness of parts in systems.

> So it begins when I put food in my mouth. The microbiome is doing its work in keeping you healthy, and whenever you do something that is not good for your body, the system breaks down. And in the same way we can see real world systems when they are built. When everything is not working together the system breaks down, and that is what we are seeing. And that is how our economy and our country challenge you. It's an unhealthy system.

She then questioned, how systems could be changed.

> So how do you affect the system? I brought it back to the gut: how can you improve the function of your body, your immune system, by what you put in?
> You can chip away at a system, things don't change immediately, and when you look at your health, there are things you can do to improve your health: by the things you eat, and the water you drink….

The gut as teacher

Eating and food illustrate how humans are entangled with other creatures and plants. In her book 'Eating in Theory', Mol (2021) suggests that eating allows people to 'breath, read, write, clean, cook, stay warm, and otherwise burn energy.' As energy is not material, a thing to hold in one's hand, but the result of a process, she concludes that integration happens when the food has been broken down and turned into constituent parts that are delivered to other parts of the body system. Walking '*through* the world' requires energy, and this energy is generated through eating '*from* the world'. The completed digestive process ends with elimination of waste – and as the waste products leave the body, they return '*to* the world'. This prompts Mol to wonder what might happen if we were to stop

celebrating the humans' cognitive reflections *about* the world, and 'take our cues instead from human metabolic engagements *with* the world?' (Mol, 2021, p. 3).

The very visceral way in which the outside world literally passes through us (Barnacle, 2009), what Michelson (2015) called the relationship between body and belief, lives, ecological context and power, contradicts the perception that Nature is inert, passive. Sheldrake (2020) has documented how fungi communicate and enter into complex relationships, and, indeed, as he argues, make decisions – despite not having a brain. Although his studies were not conducted on the gut microbiome, there may be similarities in the way fungal hyphae branch and fuse with a clear sense of direction, creating complex networks. In ecosystems outside human bodies, fungi make mycelium, living labyrinths that have been used to learn strategic design, such as the transport networks of major cities like Tokyo. Fungi interact intensely with other species, often creating nested arrangements with symbiotic relations of reciprocity, such as the symbiosis between fungi and algae. If we accept that nature is not external to human beings, 'as hunter gatherers and other indigenous people already knew' (Morizot, 2022, p. 2), we can imagine similar entanglements inside.

The gut as teacher struck a chord: A participant commented on how 'the stomach' talks: 'My child has such a noisy stomach. It talks all the time. Loud rumbling and grumbling!' Others agreed: if one listens to the gut 'talking', one would know when a child was hungry. When the 'teacher' deep in participants' bodies speaks loudly in order to transmit feelings of wellbeing or trouble, the body-owner often attempts to silence it, not bothering to try and interpret the source of protest or celebration. Becoming aware, people can listen to and learn from a knowledge system at work, one that is as ancient and varied as living beings. Despite the organ living in each human and most more-than-human beings, modern humans are generally unable to make sense of its language. Highlighting how an organ within the body can be the teacher, if we are ready to listen and observe, was an exciting discovery.

The gut pedagogy illustrated how situating learning within the body, with the gut as 'teacher' shows up the intricate entanglement and mutual interdependence of human and non-human entities. The interrelatedness and connectivity between all the parts in the body shows how systems function. While each person's microbiome is unique, and all microbiomes can only survive within the particular digestive system it finds itself, all systems work the same way. Endangering the health of bacteria in the gut by consuming fast food rather than nutritious food, taking laxatives or antibiotics and the cultural ritual of enemas threaten the health of the microbiome. Vanessa took this lesson to heart:

> After that session it clicked. As a result I now look after my own health. There is a consciousness like never before. I feel I must preserve the little people (rubs her abdomen, laughing). Suddenly, when I eat I think of the microbiome, and how I must look after it! I am in connection with my body as I have never been before.

The notion that the microbiome are living creatures that work invisibly triggered the connection to other invisible labours. 'Reading the world', an older woman raised the issue of the gendered divisions of labour in the home, and how this work is rarely acknowledged. She laughed as she pointed out how the act of cleaning is only noticed when it is not done! Using the gut as an illustration of patriarchal systems proved to be a useful starting point for exploring inequality and power both in the home, and beyond, and how only larger systemic transformations can bring about the changes required for survival.

In the final session of the course 'Reading the World' participants were asked to create a 'mind map' to consider and show how 'the gut' fitted into the curriculum.

Without fail, 8 groups showed the interconnectedness, the entanglement of everything, from the 'Earth to table' (Barndt et al., 2023) journey to communication, problem analysis to research tools, issues of power to mental health in a context of violence. One group produced a drawing that also illustrated the links between environment, climate change, food production and the gut system. It included waste processing through composting, thus illustrating the circle of food production, consumption, re-growing.

The 'world' of participants in this course is, as outlined above, precarious and dangerous. After years of working in the wilderness, Mbatha, 'The Black Lion', observed that 'It is hard to reflect on your connection with the living world when your stomach is empty and your mind consumed with anxiety about providing for yourself and your family' (Mbatha, 2021, p. 265). Connecting people with the stomachs and overall health as linked to socio-economic context was a useful starting point for exploring systems, more widely. Months after the course, participants still refer to the 'gut session' and the connection between commercial food systems and health.

Conclusions

'Can we learn from our bodies?', asks Ian McCallum, (2005):

> To me, human anatomy is one of the finest examples I know of biological differentiation and diversity. It is a living definition of ecology, an embodiment of the interactions and interdependence between molecules, cells, tissues, organs, and systems, sensitive to both the inner and outer environments. (McCallum, 2005, p. 46)

The 'gut pedagogy' responds to his question with a resounding 'yes'. Every time I run the 'gut pedagogy', the need for many different parts in a system comprising entangled components to work together harmoniously is well understood. Starting from 'where people are' – with the gut – holds promise to build sustained and sustainable connections with all living things. The challenge now is to broaden reflection and action to inhabiting the space where we live with greater care and critical consciousness.

In the 'gut pedagogy', knowledge is drawn from multiple sources, not least physical embodied ones, showing how the separation of different sources and kinds of knowledge is an artificial construct that belies forces of life. As the interwoven fungi that line a forest floor create conditions for life, a meaningful sense of the world is made by connecting parts and particles and knitting them together. While science is often experienced as dull and distant experimentation in a laboratory, the science in the gut-pedagogy is made creative, joyful, a human activity where our bodies are the laboratories and the gut is the teacher. Any struggle for transformation requires energy and focus. Energy is produced in the process of digestion – both mentally and physically. Our bodies are with us, wherever we go – and we need to care for them to sustain life – our own, and the more-than-human world that we care for.

Andreotti (Decolonial Futures Collective, 2023) suggests we need to 'expand space and hold space for difficult things without feeling overwhelmed or immobilised – develop stamina and resilience for the long haul'. She proposes a 'probiotic education', one that helps learners process information through inquiry, insight, hindsight, foresight. She speaks about 'educating the gut for the heart to be filled, so that the head can follow'. Sadly, how to learn from and with the gut by making wise food choices that will also feed the brain is often only a choice for affluent people. Living under conditions of precarity, as hinted at by Mbatha, may involve knowing what to eat, without having physical, economic, social, environmental access to such sustenance. The probiotic education Andreotti advocates necessitates a change in the material conditions that would

enable deliberations about relations between humans, more-than-humans and the earth. But would working towards different kinds of futures that would ensure greater equality not require a change in systems?

Given the increasing complexities of uncertain, high-risk, everyday living and working educators need to ask what kind of education might hold the space for this complexity. To open hearts and minds begins with acknowledging and overcoming the colonisation of our imagination and rejecting our attachment to a single story – particularly one that is steeped in violence. Learning from and about the gut can teach us all humility, as we are confronted with our often self-inflicted vulnerability in terms of food choices, connections with other living beings, environmental pressures and deficiencies, and structures and systems we have put in place or keep on maintaining. The microbiomes deep in people's bodies speak, yet we refuse to listen and bear the consequences. The 'gut pedagogy' is one attempt of feminist popular education to facilitate opening a window to making different choices.

Microbes have given us bread, cheese and wine; their social interaction is exemplary as they communicate, using signals and enzymes. Maybe we can learn from the microbiome in our gut, that working together we can identify the 'hostile' forces that threaten our immune systems – both inside and out. How would it be, if all human creatures cooperated in building a pluriworld where food security also meant sustain-worthy conditions for all? A pluriworld cannot include wars, patriarchy, divisions; it requires love and cooperation, humility and respect and living in balance with each other and the more-than-human world. The gut is our teacher – let us listen!

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Exploring lost spaces: Integrating place, arts, and adult education

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Abstract

This study seeks to investigate the potential evolution of education when integrated with place, addressing socio-ecological degeneration. Special attention is given to art education, which not only views places as learning locations but also recognizes the material and relational aspects of a place's ecology as having epistemic value. The inquiry into art education practices delves beyond art-based methods and draws on the rich tradition of place-based practices. To illustrate the contribution of art education to sustainability, the study examines the collaborative project 'Full Line, Broken Line: The Future of Liminal Landscapes' in Serbia, focusing on disrupted landscapes near Belgrade. This insight into how investigation and learning about a locality can elicit memories and interpretations through the lens of absence demonstrates the importance of the interaction of temporal and spatial dimensions when learning about what is lost and the possibility for renewal.

Keywords: spatial turn, place, art education, adult learning, art science project

Introduction

Place is a necessary precondition for being and acting. In its broadest sense, it represents a fundamental and inevitable component of existence. 'To exist at all as a (material or mental) object or as (an experienced or observed) event is to have a place - to be implaced however minimally or imperfectly or temporarily' (Casey, 2018, p. 13). However, it has been somewhat neglected in the study of adult education, unlike the temporal dimension, which is predominately used for understanding development and learning within the main discourse on education. Many educational programmes are designed according to a clearly defined time frame, and the concepts of adult education and learning are often shaped, seemingly emancipatory, by temporal metaphors (e.g., lifelong learning, the document 'It's Never Too Late to Learn,' 'It's Always a Good Time,' and so on). Spatial universality and temporal differentiation are expressed in the contemporary context of

globalization, where the influence of international organizations further intensifies this tendency. For example, by introducing achievement assessment programs, the spatial category gains comparative application, particularly evident in international rankings and comparisons of long-term progress and efficiency of educational systems. As educational imagination is mostly conditioned and coloured by temporality, I am interested in exploring the directions in which education can evolve when integrated with the place and addresses socio-ecological degeneration. By doing so, special attention is dedicated to art education, which boasts a rich tradition of delving into place-based practices, as seen in the works of artists such as Andy Goldsworthy, Richard Long, and Ana Mendieta. Furthermore, in art education practices that explore specific landscapes and sites, places are usually not merely regarded as learning locations; the material and relational aspects of a place's ecology hold epistemic value, serving as a source for creation and learning. This involves appreciating complexity, unlocking opportunities, cultivating creativity, and prompting intentional engagement, rather than encouraging particular behaviors or specific forms of learning (Formenti et al., 2019).

Art education practices encompass far more than reliance on art-based methods. Suzi Gablik is a visual artist and art critic famous for her criticism of the modernist view on purposeless art. In her seminal work on connective aesthetics, Gablik (1995) considers that art that creates specialized objects to be contemplated and enjoyed is socially impotent. Such art, she believes, is an active participant in maintaining capitalist ideology and consumerist attitude. 'Among artists, there is a greater critical awareness of the social role of art and a rejection of modernism's bogus ideology of neutrality' (Gablik, 1995, p. 75). This awareness of contemporary artists and the emergence of public and community art opened a space for practices that entail the intersection of arts, education, and social engagement. Contemporary art-making can be a learning process in itself, or a curriculum strategy (Eça et al., 2017) that generates knowledge as an inherent part of an open-ended process of creation and community engagement.

Decuypere et al. (2019) have cautioned against relying on preconceived learning outcomes in adult education as a simplistic and linear solution to complex contemporary challenges that may lead to an educational environment characterized by eco-totalitarianism, fostering compliance rather than critical thinking among learners. Swillens et al. (2021) criticized the instrumental approach to sustainability in education that focuses on acquiring a specific set of knowledge and skills that originates in the assumption that the future is predictable and that 'experts know how people should be prepared in order to realize a sustainable world' (Swillens et al., 2021, p. 2). Without a specific learning outcome in mind, the production of knowledge, characterized by its high contextualization and material nature, is an inherent part of art education practice embedded in place. As rightly put by Rene Susa (2019), who shares her view on aesthetic interventions as a part of the RELA issue dedicated to Adult Education and the Aesthetic Experience, they open a crack in the ways we see and sense ourselves in the world. But even more than that, art education incorporates embodied making, capable of evoking, what Relph (1976) refers to as a profound sense of 'insideness of place' (p. 49).

To demonstrate the unique role of art education, and the distinct contributions of such interdisciplinary approaches in advancing sustainability, I will provide an example from the collaboration between art and science in Serbia's 'Full Line, Broken Line: The Future of Liminal Landscapes.' This project examines two disrupted landscapes near Belgrade – surface coal mines and mountains altered by quarries. For the purpose of this investigation, I focused specifically on the coal mines. According to the authors of the project (Putnik et al., 2023), this site 'opened up to them,' and they also organize walks there as part of their artistic intervention. To establish theoretical clarity for a deeper

understanding of place and learning, the next chapters will provide a very brief and incomplete summary of the implications of the spatial turn on the thinking of adult education. Although the spatial turn occurred several decades ago, it is crucial to highlight its significance for educational thought, considering that this work aims to understand place within its epistemic framework, not merely as a location for learning. This perspective emphasizes the dynamic relationship between space, knowledge production, and educational practices, advocating for a deeper exploration of how spatial contexts shape learning experiences.

Spatial turn and adult education research

In the intellectual discussions of the 1970s and 1980s, a significant shift known as the spatial turn emerged, elevating the significance of location and space in scholarly analysis. The seminal work of American geographer and philosopher Edward Sodža, 'Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory,' published in the late 1980s, played a pivotal role in championing the spatial turn. It laid the groundwork for subsequent research, acknowledging space and place as intricate interpretive categories demanding to be carefully analyzed to better understand various aspects of social dynamics. Critical human geography reinvigorated spatial perspectives within contemporary social theory, challenging the prevailing authority of time and history as the unquestionable interpreters of social existence and the architects of emancipatory political consciousness (Sodža, 2013). The spatial turn revitalized thinking about place and space, transforming them from abstract categories into significant factors in interpreting social relationships. This spatialization of critical thought was not merely a superficial replacement for previous temporal approaches but, among other things, highlighted geographical inequality and provided one of the more productive critical perspectives. This inequality has been interpreted for more than two centuries as the delayed diffusion of development (such as capitalist modernity) into undeveloped, traditional, still incompletely modernized parts of the world. Here, the primary vision was Eurocentric, linking modernization everywhere to the historical dynamics of European industrial capitalism (Sodža, 2013). The criterion of linear temporality was applied to the analysis of social development. For example, this trend is observable in programs such as the aforementioned PISA and PIAAC achievement assessment programs, where the educational systems of countries are evaluated based on how far they have progressed in development, without sufficiently considering the context of each country or the complexity of international influences. Instead of being considered horizontally, educational systems are compared solely through the prism of time and progress.

Although spatial references in adult education research are becoming more explicit, place is rarely considered as a source or content of knowledge. It is still seen as a learning venue within the framework of formal or nonformal education. In the introductory chapter of the book 'Adult Education and Space: Theoretical Perspectives – Professional Practice – Frameworks of Learning' (Erwachsenenbildung und Raum Theoretische Perspektiven – professionelles Handeln – Rahmungen des Lernens), the editors (Kraus et al., 2015) identified space as a neglected interpretative category but also emphasized a pronounced and enduring interest in this topic, particularly in relation to where adult learning takes place. Undoubtedly, locations for adult learning have been an important topic in the tradition of adult education and the establishment of the practice. In adult education research, spatial relationships have mostly been implicit, examining the significance of individual spatial dimensions for research questions without explicit theoretical considerations of the concept of space. Attention has been given to their didactic function

and finding characteristics of spaces that stimulate learning. However, more recently, building on the work of Low, symbolic-institutional, material-infrastructural, and social-interactional aspects intertwine, emphasizing the relationality of this concept (Low, 2001, as cited in Mania et al., 2015). The complex nature of informal adult education and community education has become a source of research interest, especially regarding how space and its meanings shape the educational experience.

Before presenting the relevant art education interventions, I will offer a brief insight into the phenomenological exploration of place and learning, emphasizing the importance of the lived experience and body engagement in creating meaningful connections. Dwelling is not merely about physical locality; it involves continuous, embodied, and relational processes of life-making. Although there is a rich body of literature exploring various adult education practices that link to the concept of public pedagogy (Hannum & Rhodes, 2018; Biesta, 2012; Sandlin et al., 2011; Popović et al., 2018; Popović et al., 2020) that address social and political dimension of space and learning, the phenomenological understanding of place provides an adequate framework to explore the process of learning from and through place as it delves into the intimate, embodied, and experiential aspects. Authors such as Edward Casey (2018) and E.V. Relph (1976) offer comprehensive and well-established perspectives on engagement with place, which can foster more relational and experiential dimensions of education. Their work connects the lived experience of place with the creation of attachment and a sense of belonging, emphasizing the importance of personal and emotional connections to one's environment in the learning process, which is highly relevant for tending to lost places.

The dynamic interplay of place, belonging, and art education: A phenomenological perspective

In our lived experiences, places are not static entities; rather, they are constantly emerging or becoming. Philosopher and phenomenologist Edward Casey (2018) suggests that place is more than just a physical location and question the long tradition of considering place as a sheer container. Following the phenomenological thought of Heidegger and Marley Ponty, he argues that the place is an outcome of bodily engagement. "The body is at once the subject of place and its animator; it is the agent who is not just aware of the place it takes up but also able to alter it in ways that suit its staying there longer (Casey, 2018, p. 21). According to Casey (2018) the sense of belonging, of being in place, is constituted by moving around and settling. Relph (1976) refers to places with which we form attachments as fields of care. These places are often not arbitrary but purposefully created. In this act of creation, a sense of belonging takes root, and attachment becomes an investment, manifesting itself as a commitment to the place. By attaching meaning to places, learning evolves into a dynamic interplay of knowing and being known and emerges from a profound engagement with the surroundings. Art education practices can enable these senseful interactions with places, fostering what Edward Relph (1976) terms 'insideness of place' (p. 49) that encapsulates a sense of belonging and identification with the place. Artistic practices, employing a variety of mediums, have a capacity to deepen the connection with a specific place. Narratives and imagination become vessels for the exploration of meanings but also strengthen a sense of belonging to a particular community and place. Casey (2005) has written extensively on art as a means to reveal place, arguing that artistic practices can sharpen our perception of landscapes and provide new insights into what was once overlooked or hidden. 'To map out in a positive and productive sense means to undertake a voyage into the dark side of matter, into its potentialities – a voyage into what is not yet the case. It is to chart out one's course over

uncertain waters' (Casey, 2005, p. 191).The artistic exploration of a landscape ventures into a realm of possibilities, exemplified by works such as 'Full Line Broken Line,' which suggests that liminal landscapes should be viewed for their potential rather than through the lens of loss. The intersection of the possible domain of artistic work and bodily engagement with materiality can foster a sense of attachment and hope.

Thus, what the phenomenologists such as Casey (2018) and Relph (1976) are pointing at is that belonging is not a passive feeling that develops by being in one place but it is a critical and creative engagement with an aliveness of a community. However, the sense of belonging to a place has been diminished by the 'undermining of place for both individuals and cultures, and the casual replacement of the diverse and significant places of the world with anonymous spaces and exchangeable environments' (Relph 1976, p. 143). There is a sense of consumption rather than creation, contributing to a feeling of placelessness (Relph, 1976) and dislocation. The erosion of specific qualities of the place, due to globalization, modernization, and emphasis on functionality and effectiveness, has been continuously decreasing the agency of individuals to meaningfully engage with the places they occupy in their everyday life. Furthermore, the European Union has actively promoted the development of a unique European identity through education and mobility. Although it has created profound opportunities for learning and living, the constant demand for the flow of the workforce provokes the citizens to constantly answer the question of belonging and make decisions on their future location. The enormous problem of housing, demands constant readiness for relocation, potentially hindering a conscious effort to establish a sense of belonging. Amidst these complex trends, citizens are warned about potential catastrophic scenarios related to ecological changes, urging them to either take action or come to terms with the inevitability of environmental transformations. While acknowledging multilayered and complex dimensions of belonging, especially in the context of inequality, injustice, and exclusion (Vandenabeele et al., 2023), we, as researchers and adult educators, must grapple with a crucial question: Is it possible to cultivate fields of care and take meaningful action without attachment to physical locations?. How can adult education foster 'insideness of place'? As already indicated, art education practices can be a catalyst for a rich and meaningful dialogue between individuals and the places they inhabit, promoting a sense of rootedness and interconnectedness.

Reclaiming knowledge through place

To clarify the connection between the previous discussion and the case I intend to explore, it is essential to focus on the kind of knowledge that can emerge when people establish a meaningful connection with a specific place. This is particularly relevant to the artistic intervention I aim to discuss. The debate on place and space has served us in locating educational practices that perceive place as sources of knowledge by exploring local knowledge and practices. An informed understanding of a place considers various strategies of inhabitation, as well as the openness and capacity to listen to the collective memory keepers within the community, who preserve memories of harmful ecological practices, as well as traditions of self-sustainability (Bowers, 2008). Thus, on one hand, it is a practice that critically examines global power structures, but it finds its foundation in the specific relationships of a particular place, which unveils and offers various ways of knowing and living.

As mentioned by Cresswell (2014), a place has a particular epistemic value as it builds our understanding of the world we inhabit. However, we do not rely much on the knowledge that arises from a particular environment but employ universal and

disembodied truths on the specific locality, usually to modify its purposes. Recently, there have been significant contributions that embrace the materiality of and non-human relations of a place and advocate for a humbler approach to educational practices and such educational interventions often originate from the domain of art education. Contemporary artists have been engaging with land art, eco-art, public and community art, among other practices, drawing attention and prompting the public to reconsider its connection to places. Artists operating beyond conventional settings have utilized artistic approaches that align more with social activism and community work than with creating and disseminating art objects. By departing from traditional venues, these artists integrated their practices with the specificity of locations and individuals, drawing on community knowledge, memories and rituals. They rely on poetic language to explore affective dimensions and work with imagination to explore possibilities of actions (Da Silva, 2016).

These nuanced efforts can foster a sense of belonging and attachment, which is crucial for meaningful engagement with a place. The sense of belonging and connection to a place can be fostered through creative placemaking. This approach, seen as a tool for participatory action that relies on art and culture to revitalize spaces and imbue them with new meanings (Heard et al., 2023). Art is a unique epistemic modality that is not merely an expression of the personal or a reflection of the existing, but a practice that actively generates new knowledge, even though this knowledge is not factually expressed through words or numbers. It represents a framework within which new interpretations and reinterpretations of existing forms and meanings are created, integrating thought and action into an indivisible whole rather than opposing them (Maksimović, in press).

However, in the case of the proposed artistic practice, placemaking has already occurred through the deterioration of the landscape due to mining. The process of placemaking begins anew through embodied engagement. Formenti et al. (2019) underline the significance of aesthetic experience in adult education, emphasizing its relationality, embodiment, vulnerability, and uncertainty that stand in contrast to hegemonic discourses that prioritize rationality and reflexivity. To illustrate this argument, I will give an example from art education practices that offer perspectives for differentiated knowledge production by interweaving the physical, biological, and anthroposociological spheres. Considering that there has been huge potential in creative and bold endeavors that respond to the question of how to live together, there is a lack of aesthetic practices that explore our connection to places, the ones we are creating together, or even to lost places. I will go deeper into an exploration of the practice that investigates the liminality of places that are lost due to mining and exploitation of resources, 'a qualitative epistemological opening to expand our understanding of complexities in a subject-object relationship' (Da Silva, 2016, p. 111).

Détournement: Why psychogeography shouldn't be a catch-all for walking practices

Integrating walking into art education practices does not always align with a psychogeographic approach. While this might seem like a detour from the main focus of this paper, exploring the relationship between psychogeography and walking practices is a compelling discussion and might offer some interesting insights and propose questions to adult educaton researchers. . Building on the discussion of psychogeography and its role in adult education, it's important to address how the use of this term in educational contexts can sometimes overlook its radical roots. Psychogeography, originally developed as a method of city mapping and experiential exploration by the Situationist

International, was deeply intertwined with avant-garde Marxist political and artistic movements. These groups were not merely interested in exploring urban spaces but aimed to radically transform everyday life and challenge existing social and economic power structures.

As we explore the potential of psychogeography in adult education, it is crucial to recognize that this concept was not intended to be a generic term for learning through walking. Instead, it carried with it a specific political agenda aimed at revolutionizing life through the creation of new situations and behaviors, as highlighted in the *Report on the Construction of Situations* (Debord, 1957). The Situationists envisioned their tactics, such as dérive (drifting) and détournement (diversion), as part of a broader effort to challenge bourgeois society and its values, aiming for a radical transformation of everyday life. However, as Swyngedouw (2002) has noted, the original revolutionary force of these ideas has been somewhat diluted in their educational translation. What was once a politically charged and transformative practice has often become a depoliticized and aestheticized tool in contemporary settings.

This tactic has been recognized by educational researchers who propose it as a learning methodology, a specific form of walking with educational outcomes. Biesta and Cowell (2012) see it as a means to enhance civic learning that supports pluralism and democracy; Bassett (2004) describes psychogeography as an aesthetic practice and a critical tool, Sthele (2008) as a teaching tool; Kim (2021) explores the pedagogical effects of this practice, arguing that it is used to create a more democratic city. However, we might question whether it strays from its original conceptual frameworks, and political aspirations from which it originated. The educational practice involving psychogeographic interventions lacks clarity in its political goals, as well as the playful transformation of space aimed at liberating it from conventional social forms and meanings that shape pleasures and everyday life. The playfulness, essential for disrupting the imposed bourgeois seriousness of life situations, moral values, and the functionality of urban spaces, seems to be missing in educational interventions, which often reduce the practice to a critical examination of the economic, political, and social factors shaping a particular place, or to storytelling and documenting impressions (Maksimović, in press).

In light of this, I argue that the exploration conducted by the artistic group I worked with, while engaging with the concepts of place and space, did not embrace the radical intentions of psychogeography as envisioned by the Situationists. The group's work, while valuable in its own right, did not aim to create new situations or radically transform everyday life in the way that the Situationists intended. Instead, it focused on engagement with place, which, though meaningful, do not align with the original revolutionary aims of psychogeography.

This distinction is crucial as we consider the kind of knowledge that can be generated when people build a connection with a specific place. In the case of the artistic intervention I intend to discuss, the focus is not on radical social transformation but rather on the creation of new interpretations and connections to place through the integration of arts and science. This approach, while different from the Situationist agenda, still offers valuable insights into how we can engage with and understand the spaces we inhabit, fostering new forms of knowledge and community engagement.

Stories of lost places: Art science project in Serbia

In the following chapter, the topic of this paper will be further explicated by providing the account of the *Full Line, Broken Line: The Future of Liminal Landscapes* (Puna crta prekinuta crta: Budućnost liminalnih predela), an artistic research project implemented

within the art+science programme of the Center for the Promotion of Science. It was initiated and created by the collaborative team of Milena Putnik, Nemanja Lađić, Suzana Gavrilović, and Milovan Milenković, landscape architects, visual artists, and university professors at the Faculty of Forestry, University of Belgrade, Serbia, to explore the convergence of politics, economy and power, and to encourage citizens to critically examine the dynamics that shape their environments. The project highlights the tensions arising from the necessity for resources and the substantial human impact on the landscape. Themes of being within or outside of a place, the concepts of placelessness and dislocation due to enormous exploitation, and the exploration of lost places and possibility for their regeneration are integral aspects of the work.

> The authors[1] delve into the dynamics and visual impact of exploitation. The work provokes questions about the interconnectedness of the local ecological issues with the global economy and political regime in Serbia. This dramatic transformation has rendered these landscapes as border zones, where the previous state is entirely overwritten by human intervention, and a newfound stability remains elusive. These exploited areas will need to undergo a restoration process. Liminality, encompassing uncertainty and apprehension, also presents a positive aspect: it facilitates a reconsideration of fundamental goals and values that form the basis for future choices. Given the anticipated surge in mining activities outlined in the proposed spatial plan for the Republic of Serbia until 2035, such landscapes may become increasingly prevalent. (Putnik et al., 2023).

In addition to viewing the exhibition and reviewing the project proposal, I engaged in discussions with the two authors of the work, Milena (an artist and a university professor at the Faculty of Forestry, Landscape Architecture, University of Belgrade, Serbia) and Suzana (a scientist and a university professor at the Faculty of Forestry, Landscape Architecture, University of Belgrade, Serbia). These interactions aimed at acquiring a knowledge of the artistic processes – unique lived and learning experiences for the authors. I also examined the relevant websites, documents, and media releases related to the subject, with the intention of offering contextual information to the reader that can facilitate a more profound understanding of the issues tackled by the project. The locations selected by the authors carry an important temporal dimension, as their utilization and management depended very much on socio-political context in the former Yugoslavia and Serbia. During the Yugoslav era, state policies and economic priorities drove large-scale industrial projects, while subsequent political and economic shifts in Serbia further altered the landscape, reflecting broader socio-political changes and conflicts. In the aftermath of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Serbia experienced a turbulent period and Kolubara became emblematic of the challenges associated with privatization and corruption.

This work is an eco-visualization, a collaborative transdisciplinary practice that integrates visual art, technology, and landscape architecture to render ecological issues visible. The project advocates for ecological responsibility by engaging with a specific location, whose visual elements contribute to understanding exploitation and extensive destruction. The intensive exploitation of coal and the occupation of large areas for the purpose of mining, result in the relocation of watercourses, infrastructure systems, and parts of settlements, as well as the displacement of the population from vulnerable communities (Basarić & Prnjat, 2013). The barren landscape also elicits a sense of loss and grief, prompting a call for restorative actions. However, these places are remote, lacking a sense of belonging or attachment. The artists and researchers have chosen two case studies, both of which have enormous importance for the Serbian economy and society. The first case study the Kolubara Mining Basin extends over a vast area beyond the territory of Belgrade, represents the largest coal mine in the Balkans (Putnik et al.,

2023) and covers an area of approximately 50 square kilometers (Basarić & Prnjat, 2013). Given that it serves as the primary coal supplier for *Elektroprivreda Srbije*, it holds a crucial role in ensuring the country's energy independence. However, in 2021, a group of scientists (Mesarović, 2023) affiliated with the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts published a significant document titled 'The Development of the Electric Power Industry in the Republic of Serbia by 2050':

> Contrary to the common belief of energy self-sufficiency with (currently) relatively low import dependence, Serbia is an energy-poor country. Despite having hydro potential, biomass, solar, and wind resources, the primary domestic foundation of Serbia's energy comes from low-caloric coal (lignite), whose reserves are gradually depleting. Meanwhile, a significant portion of oil and gas consumption must be covered through imports. (Mesarović, 2023, p. 21)

Approximately 50% of Serbia's electricity is generated from lignite sourced from Kolubara, contributing to around 20 billion kW hours of electricity annually (Elektroprivreda Srbije [EPS], n.d.). Moreover, the utilization of these resources was deemed beneficial for all citizens, especially considering that until April 2023, it functioned as a public enterprise, dedicated to delivering services and managing resources in the public interest. This year, it underwent the transformation into a joint-stock company. It is also worth mentioning that Kolubara played a crucial role in the October 5th changes in 2000, which marked a significant political shift in Serbia leading to the overthrow of Slobodan Milošević's regime (Barlovac, 2010). During that time, workers shut down heavy machinery and halted coal excavation, which was crucial for the production of electrical energy (Borović, 2011).

Exploring collaborative Insights: reflections on art Education and the epistemic value of place

In the forthcoming chapter, I will present excerpts from the interview with Suzana and Milena, accompanied by my reflections on the nature of their collaboration, the authors' learning experiences during the investigation of the places, and the organized walk – an art education experience aimed at a broader audience. For the continuation of this study, insights derived from participants in the walk will provide additional illumination on the epistemic value of the walk as a distinctive educational experience. Nevertheless, for the focus of this paper, emphasizing the presentation of the work itself takes precedence.

At the start of the discussion, Suzana, the scientist, mentioned that participating in art-science projects gave her the freedom to take more risks in her research.

> It's not enough for me to do what I do every day; I needed to take an extra step. Trying something more challenging was a necessity. It's okay to experiment; nothing detrimental will happen to us. It may seem like a game, but in reality, the topic is very serious. Despite the gravity of the situation, it was manageable for me, thanks to the team.

The artistic practice was the exploration and learning process itself, as they did not have a predefined outcome, but as they stated: 'When we started, certain things began to unfold for us. We were very intuitive, much more so than scientific'. The following segments capture the impact of witnessing large stone blocks, highlighting the initial overwhelming impression, the contrast between distant observation and close proximity, and the emotional response to the size. By engaging with the place in an open-ended manner, the authors of the work could nurture an embodied and affective presence that contributed to

their insights in relation to the size of the place, oscillating between fascination and realization about the magnitude of the human impact.

> It was fascinating. I had never been to any mine. You're always passing by. Initially, all the emotions you know that it's not good, it's not right. But when you get there, at one point, you're fascinated, and you say, like, oh, I like this, can I really like this. You look at those stone blocks, and it really is not endless and enormous. You look and see that there is a little spot, but when you get there, you have some ambivalent emotions.

The visit to the Kolubara Basin and discussions with employees in the regeneration sector led to a penetrating awareness of the scale of human impact on the landscape. While there is an understanding of the displacement of places and changes in river courses, the landscape is something given and shapes human activities. As Suzana explains, it is the skeleton, something that cannot be changed. However, technological development has enabled an immeasurable and irreversible change in the landscape. What was considered stable due to human intervention has become ephemeral and variable. 'Most people don't engage with it; it's somewhere in the back of your mind. And then you see that there was a village, a large village, razed and erased for the needs of the mine. It's now just a matter of time before something else disappears tomorrow.' Education about sustainability often involves understanding ecological systems, the impact of human activities on the environment, and measures that can be taken to preserve the diversity of life on Earth. There is an awareness of a dramatic loss of species, and some artists, through their work, call on the public to grieve this loss. In her book 'The Age of Loneliness,' Laura Marris (2024) discusses absence-making and ecological loss within the catastrophic framework of the Anthropocene. However, this work is drawing attention to the loss of the landscape and long-term implications for the purpose of the coal extraction. Suzana explores the experience of dimension of the place:

> How much has humanity determined what will happen? We learn about these natural processes, and we know quite well what will happen. You go there, and he says, 'This was a plain 30 years ago; now it's a hill, a huge hill.' And you don't see that it's by human hands. In the city, it's okay for you. It's close to you. Yes, it's a large spatial scope, but you're used to it. But when you go to the mine, you just see, oh, there are no hills. For me, this is an insight into what we as humans have done. Often, we are not aware of the extent of these categories.

Milena also addresses the displacement of the residents:

> People were horrified, Vreoci was devastated. The residents were displaced, but the houses were not demolished. Social cases were relocated into them. And that village is like cursed; it's damaged, and someone is there. The atmosphere is very negative. The social framework truly shapes the landscape.

Kolubara has largely shaped the demographics of the surrounding areas. Settlements were displaced due to a change in land use, and the inhabitants were relocated. Milena and Suzana portrayed belonging as a multifaceted concept, influenced by occupational ties, economic factors, environmental challenges, and changing dynamics over time. There is a visible tension between the necessity for resources, particularly related to primary processing and infrastructure, and the adverse environmental impacts associated with these activities. 'And then here you say, "This is for us to have heating. Do we have an alternative?" It's a resource; why are we doing this now? You evacuate the village, no more village, the place is erased.' As I already mentioned in the previous paragraphs, and it was also highlighted by the authors, the population accepted this significant impact on

the environment because it was deemed to be in the public interest and provided social benefits.

> The newcomers are tied to the industry; all of them are linked to the mine, and they don't have a sense of belonging to the place. They feel allegiance to the company and money. They endure pollution, live in poor conditions, but the quality of their life is reflected in their salaries. They remain one of the largest collectives today. There is a breakdown in the sense of attachment to the place. There is no more sense of belonging. And that is also one of the reasons why that awareness must be raised again.

I initiated this article by questioning how the 'insidness of place,' which has clearly been disrupted by displacement and significant environmental degradation, can be nurtured. This place has become uninhabitable, consciously sacrificed for the betterment of the entire society. Narratives emphasizing the energy independence of the state cause the majority of the population to turn a blind eye to the negative effects of mining. The absence of emotional connection to this place results in a collective unawareness and, subsequently, a lack of initiative to address its issues. The goal of this artistic practice is to make visible, through visual materials, what is invisible to the majority of the population and to raise questions about the possibility of regenerating these liminal landscapes.

> This is also related to the morphology of the terrain because it's flat. You are not aware of how vast it is. When you pass through, it seems flat to you. This is the spatial analysis of visibility. Kolubara is a fairly flat terrain, so the excavation pit isn't very noticeable. The first time you pass through, you don't have a sense of how extensive it is. It's only when you start to engage, when you get to know it, that you realize it's much more than the spot you initially see. No, the mining isn't done there. It's dug here; this is destroyed; this used to be a village, but it isn't anymore. This is flat; they diverted the river here. The Kolubara River has been relocated three times.

Figure 1: Kolubara. Source: Marko Risović

One of the main activities in art education is an organized visit to Kolubara, including a walk through the recultivated areas in order to engage with the place. 'As part of a guided

group tour, visitors will explore the plant nursery and renewed forest, witness the spontaneously regenerated landscape of an abandoned mine, visit a relocated cemetery, and make a stop at the amphitheater overlooking the flowing waters of the Kolubara lake in the active mining area' (CPN, 2023).

> I did a walk, and it's such an ephemeral thing that you have to have a frame for it. I talked with the participants, and they really liked it. One girl told me, 'I was constantly traveling there the previous month, and I didn't know about it until I went on the walk.' The walk is staying in one place; it had that educational aspect. We also had a moment just to be in that place, to feel the scent.

Figure 2: The walk. Source: Marko Risović

One of the objectives of walking is to explore the potential for regeneration. Building on the previous narrative that highlighted the profound negative impact of human activities on the environment, strolling through the rejuvenated areas provides a sensorial experience with the potential for positive transformation. This specific art education practice serves as a relevant illustration of how sustainability education can instill a sense of hope by providing an opportunity for whole body learning. Eating an apple from rejuvenated orchard, has also a deep symbolic meaning of new beginnings and provides a profound metaphor for the cycle of life and growth. This deeply embodied experience does not produce knowledge about, but create haptic and lyrical relations with place that further builds sense of belonging and insidness of place.

> They gave us some apples, and that was the highlight for me. Those apples from the reforested area. You eat the apple and realize, this used to be a mine, and then someone managed to grow an orchard. It's symbolic. Food. Yes, now you are eating something that a person managed to uproot, to tidy up after themselves.

Figure 3: Plant nursery. Source: Marko Risović

Grounded in the Yugoslav concept of progress for the collective good, the whole interview captures a dual perspective – a poignant recognition of the loss of such a historical era and a stark confrontation with the adverse consequences of the actions and neglect of the process of rejuvenation after the '90s. The exploration of a specific locality reveals the layers of political systems that have influenced the land's management, evident in the lived experience of that place. We learn about the materiality and conditions of the landscape, observing its cycles closely tied to social structures and ideology.

> Yes, there's a wonderful plant nursery there, established thirty years ago, a forest nursery for reforestation needs. They stopped doing reforestation.

At the same time, there is a consistent reference to the imaginary space, such as Yugoslavia, which intertwines with the sensory experiences of the place. Not only are displaced settlements, agricultural assets, and forests lost, but in their loss, a lament for the eroded values of collectivism and social justice is also evident.

> The first mines date back to the 1950s, and you see it's not very large. Then, after about twenty years, everything accelerates and speeds up; now, with machines, you can do much more. In Venčac, the first quarry where they extracted marble blocks is small, even beautiful. But now, in just two years, they dig up more than in that entire previous period. Now they have technology. The demands are greater; construction is booming. As a society, we've gone crazy. In that sense, that progress no longer holds, but we remember the time when engineers were respected, solving problems, creating something for humanity.

The following text will remain intact, as its poetic expression transcends mere description and invites a reader into multisensorial exploration of an unused, but somewhat beautiful industrial landscape, capturing both the fascination and the incomprehensibility of the scene. This segment of the interview continues to highlight the enduring fascination with the Yugoslavian industrial heritage, while also underscoring the achievements made in science and technology that enhance the welfare of the population.

> When you come to that graveyard of old parts, some storage place, it's a pile of various components. You arrive and realize it's enormous, just a fraction of it, like a brake was there. You see that brake, and it's like half of this room. They have shovels. You look at them and step into it. It's like being on a ship; they are some auxiliary spare parts. I don't

know if I've seen something larger. There is no movable thing on land larger than the excavator. It's enormously big. Everything there is fascinating, it's incomprehensible until you see it.

You have a wall of coal in front of you, and you smell it, and you feel the warmth. You don't feel like you have to go another 300 meters to that wall. You can't grasp that size.

It's because it's inhuman. You live in a city designed for humans. When you see a skyscraper, it fascinates you. it's normal for you to see a mountain range.

There are those visibility limits, how far you can see details, where everything merges into each other.

How to tidy up the damage?

The aim of this article is to outline contours of pedagogy that emerged from an art-science project deeply embedded into place, questioning the power regimes that produces lost places and offering insights into the possibility for regeneration and hope. By embracing multiple ways of knowing, the project represents an illustration of art education practices that engage with the materiality of place but also with its biography, reflecting how different ideologies have produced spaces and the narratives around them. Although I did not expect that the experiences of the involved artists and reserchers would take us to a possible exploration of the narratives related to the discontinuity of the Yugoslavian state, it was a valuable insight into how investigation and learning about a particular locality can elicit memories and interpretations of those memories through the lens of what is absent. It became an account that demonstrates the importance of the interaction of the temporal and spatial dimensions when learning about what is lost, and the possibility for renewal. The symbolic significance of transforming damaged land into fertile ground is evident. This act can be interpreted as a critique of the Kolubara operations and the neglect of regeneration needs. It reflects criticism of the harmful social, economic, and environmental impacts of the current regime. Additionally, it conveys a sense of yugonostalgia – a longing for a time when the country was perceived as capable of caring for its people, meeting their existential and social needs, and fostering peace, solidarity, and unity (Maksimović, 2017). By sharing the insights aroused from the visit to the place, it was inevitable for the project's authors to draw comparisons between what once was and what exists now, interpreting these changes through the lens of political and social discontinuity. In this context, the exploration of this specific and epistemically rich locale extends beyond merely acknowledging the negative impacts of human influence. It delves into the nature and magnitude of these effects concerning the dominant ideologies that have shaped the place, particularly considering the transformations accompanying the shift from socialism to what is now recognized as a hybrid regime in Serbia (see more Popović & Maksimović, 2024). Špirić (2017), in her comprehensive study on *Ecological Distribution Conflicts and Sustainability: Lessons from the post-socialist European semi-periphery*, emphasized the significance of environmental justice in the region. She pointed out that the most intense ecological distribution conflicts[2] (O'Connor & Martinez-Alier, 1998) occur during periods of transition and privatization marked by controversial projects and an increase in material and energy flows.

Not wanting to delve further into an overly complex and extensive discussion on the transition from socialist to capitalist society, as well as the relationship of political elites to resource exploitation and the environment, I would like to conclude that artistic educational practices, with their open approach to the topic, can shed light on the extent

of changes resulting from resource exploitation. Additionally, they can open questions about the economic and political factors that mediate these changes. Given that this project primarily explores the possibilities of regenerating and reviving lost spaces, the act of walking and the sensorial exploration of the landscape provide insights into the potential reclamation of these places. As mentioned earlier, focusing on real-world problems and their causes can sometimes evoke a sense of helplessness, undermining agency. In this context, artistic educational projects highlight existing problems. They also encourage citizens to understand the economic and political factors shaping the place within the framework of time and space, prompting them to confront losses and create space for regeneration.

Walking and simply being in a place can foster a sense of belonging. Additionally, the overarching theme of this project – exploring the possibilities of liminal landscapes – implicitly raises questions about the potential for action and regeneration in a society undergoing a decades-long liminal transition. The question of belonging extends beyond approaching exploited localities and abandoned villages; it encompasses values and a specific ontology, often rooted in what no longer exists. This presents an intriguing avenue for further research.

While the project doesn't directly address memories, its exploration of a specific locality inherently calls for remembrance, confrontation, and interpretation due to its strong temporal dimension. Thus, the place under investigation isn't solely the basins of Kolubara but also the imaginary and lost spaces of Yugoslavia, with their polyphonic and contradictory interpretations. These imaginary spaces aren't what Relph (1976) conceptualizes as concrete or abstract spaces; rather, they resemble Bachelard (1994) inner spaces[3] that have emerged from the imprint of geographical and social landscapes. The further explorations could examine the role of artistic and educational practices in facilitating processes of remembrance and confrontation. The research could focus on how these practices address and reinterpret historical traumas and lost spaces, and how they contribute to collective memory and identity formation. How these spaces, though not physically present, shape and are shaped by cultural and historical narratives?

In the context of walking as a well-established artistic and educational practice, the materiality of the present landscape seems to merge with these once-existent, now-lost spaces, reflecting a complex interplay of identity. By examining places like Kolubara, researchers can uncover how these ambiguities manifest, revealing layers of socio-political beliefs and situating them within the realms of the existing, the lost, and the possible. Future studies might investigate how this integration of material and imaginary spaces impacts our perceptions of identity and place.

Notes

1   Milena Putnik, Nemanja Lađić, Suzana Gavrilović, and Milovan Milenković.

2   The term Ecological Distribution Conflicts (EDCs) was coined by Martinez Alier and Martin O'Connor (1998) to describe social conflicts born from the unfair access to natural resources and the unjust burdens of pollution.

3   Gaston Bachelard, a French philosopher and phenomenologist, in his well-known book The Poetics of Space, explores the nonmaterial realm of the psyche and how it is intertwined with and shaped by our surroundings. Bachelard delves into how our inner world, or 'inner space,' is deeply influenced by the physical and social environments we inhabit. 'Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferen t space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination' (Bachelard, 1994, p. xxxvi).

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Walk-centric deliberations: Connecting space, place, and learning

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Abstract

This article outlines methods of practice-oriented teaching at universities integrating democracy, sustainability, and learning in adult education.. The methods highlight the potential for democratic innovation in local communities in which diverse perspectives come together to address societal challenges. With a focus on sustainability and the connection among place, space, and pedagogy it introduces 'Voice-Resonance Walks,' a deliberative method piloted in Stuttgart, Germany, for social work education. It also highlights pilot deliberations at the district (Mini-Studentlab Deliberative Walks) and cityscape (Public Transport Walks) levels in Hamburg, Germany, involving interdisciplinary student groups in lifelong learning. These examples illustrate how higher education institutions are engaging with the public sphere, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups of citizens and on fostering civic learning. They aim to equip students with the knowledge and skills to become future experts, decision-makers, and active citizens, capable of understanding the challenges facing both their local neighborhoods and diverse urban spaces.

Keywords: deliberation, adult education, walk-centred method, social sustainability

Introduction

Education is one of many components in the sustainable development process or the route towards a more sustainable society (UNESCO, 2018). The three dimensions of sustainable development (also referred to as pillars) are well known and termed the ecological (also called environmental), the social (split into social/cultural), and the

economic dimensions. Even if the social dimension has been distinct, ever since sustainable development emerged in politics, this dimension has been more or less neglected as wider debates in general have prioritised environmental (i.e. climate change) and economic (i.e. industrial capitalism) perspectives (Davidson, 2009).

Opielka (2023, pp. 43-46) distinguishes four types of conceptions of social sustainability. A *narrow* understanding of social sustainability sees it, like mentioned above, as one of the three pillars of sustainability, with social sustainability being a kind of counterpart to economic and environmental sustainability, with the latter being the focus of efforts. In contrast, the *internal* understanding of social sustainability does not refer to the ecological dimension but focuses on the preservation of values within companies and institutions – for example, through foundations or in family businesses. According to this understanding, the ecological dimension only comes into view through the preservation of common goods and resources. The *sceptical* understanding of social sustainability is particularly devoted to the sustainability of functional economic systems, such as the financing of pension systems and the limitation of public debt under the aspect of intergenerational justice. The fourth understanding is termed the *wider* understanding of social sustainability. Here, social sustainability is understood as a social transformation project. Opielka also sees the sustainable development goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN) as an expression of such a wider understanding of social sustainability. In this article, we focus on the wider understanding of social sustainability.

The key question that Davidson (2009) always finds present when it is necessary to define the social dimension is 'What type of society do we want to sustain?' (Davidson, 2009, p. 616). In this question, he sees an underlying political potential with an urgent call for social ethics. This can still be regarded as the core question related to a wider understanding of sustainability in general, and social sustainability in particular. To this question, the following question could be added: Who wants to sustain their society, whose is the society and for whom is it to be sustained? Many of the contemporary sustainability challenges are related to the social sphere.

In 2015, the UN member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. A core promise of the agenda is 'to leave no one behind'; specifically, goal 10 focuses on reducing inequality within and between countries. Goal 4 of the 17 SDGs particularly focuses on the equal right to education for all and simultaneously calls for adult education: 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (UNESCO, 2018). In order to achieve such a sustainable development, the contours of future societies must be drawn as clearly as possible. This also applies to the normative foundations of sustainability. Dörre (2022, p. 203) suggests using the SDGs as a normative basis for those strategies that aim to free societies from the constraints of rapid, permanent economic growth. Therefore, re-learning will be essential, and pedagogical efforts will be needed to enable or at least accompany and support this learning (Dinkelaker, 2023, p. 47).

Against this background, we first outline the links between sustainability and adult education in the context of participatory democracy. We argue that the current methods of participation make it difficult to include marginalised groups and bring pluralistic positions into exchange. Therefore, we argue for place-based and walk-centric methods. As an example of such methods, we present participatory and deliberative course elements carried out in Germany with students in Hamburg and in Stuttgart as examples that can also be used in adult education. Finally, we discuss the results methodologically and place them in the context of the current debate on social sustainability.

Sustainability and (adult) education

The current crisis of democracy has led to democratic innovations. Methods promoting political participation and deliberative democracy play an essential role in advancing democratic practices. This is reinforced by the current discourse on sustainability:

> With the Rio Conference in the 1990s, the Local Agenda 21 strategies strengthened a new trend towards more deliberative political participation with a focus on sustainability. [...] A broader participatory space with democratic innovations as a 'deliberative turn' can be seen in several new participatory instruments in the invited and invented space. (Kersting, 2021, p. 1)

Here, the term 'invented space' is used to refer to the bottom-up actions of civil society, such as demonstrations of the climate movement or actions in public space. On the other hand, invited space refers to new models of participation initiated by governments or public authorities, which aim to increase the role of initiatives in local decision-making processes. This form of participation is increasingly being accused of only integrating certain groups into participation processes.

However, several studies have emphasised the crucial role of adult education in promoting sustainability. Lükő and Kollarics (2013) as well as Griswold (2017) highlight the importance of sustainability and ecojustice education in adult learning. Lükő and Kollarics (2013) specifically discuss the connection between sustainable development and adult education. Sumner (2003) extends this discussion to the community level, thereby suggesting that environmental adult education can contribute to local sustainability. These studies collectively emphasise the potential of adult education in advancing sustainability.

Only the current perception of the climate and sustainability issue as a comprehensive social crisis enables the specialised delegation of the pedagogical task exclusively to established educational institutions to be invalidated: Instead, given the global dimensions of the crisis, re-learning is considered necessary everywhere and without exception. Educational efforts can no longer be limited to the day-to-day business of educational institutions (Dinkelaker, 2023). Education must make a difference and promote self-transformation and the transformation of the societies that the individuals and groups are a part of (Wolff, 2015). Educators are crucial in the learning process, according to Wolff and Ehrström (2020), and sustainability teaching and learning requires engaged and creative educators (Burns et al., 2019). It is the educators' role to raise provocative questions and encourage critical thinking by asking the students for convincing arguments. Adult educators help students to acquire the necessary skills, sensitivities, and understanding so they become critically reflective participators in dialectical discourses (Mezirow, 2009). Thus, the discussions among students are important. According to Taylor (2009, p. 9), 'it is within the arena of dialogue that experience and critical reflection play out'.

Rieckmann (2018) argues that a task for education for sustainable development is to support individuals so they begin to reflect on their own roles as actively promoting global social and environmental sustainability now and in the future. In turn, Roos (2015) advocates for a more holistic education. Education here does not primarily imply the acquisition of existing knowledge but rather the development of new knowledge (Dinkelaker, 2023). This is necessary because of the lack of viable concepts. The complexity of the ecological question makes it necessary that the development of these concepts by specialised scientists alone is not sufficient. Rather, all people must participate in this development of knowledge, based on their respective life situations and

they must develop the necessary skills to do so. According to Wolff and Ehrström (2020), in discussions regarding sustainability, and particularly in relation to teaching and learning, the topic of transformation is increasingly present. However, transformative learning is developed for use in adult education and based on deliberative democracy.

In this article, we present examples in which deliberation and learning are combined in walk-centric methods. The use of methods based on walks and place-based in situ observations is not a new concept. Walk methods have been utilised in linguistic landscape studies, as noted by Garvin (2011) and Evans and Jones (2011). Middleton (2018, p. 298) argues that there is 'a growing interest in walking as method and practice'. A multitude of different walk-centric methods have been developed in different fields of research – for example, Development Walk, Deliberative Walks, Marginal Walking, Transdisciplinary Walks, WalkingLabs, Walking Interviews, Walking Tours, Strollology, Critical Walking Methods, City Walks, 'Go-Along' Walks, Structural District Walks, Everyday Urban Walking, Walking Ethnography. Truman and Springgay (2016) state: 'Walking as an artistic and participatory practice reappears in various disciplines, including its intersections with social science and humanities research methods and methodologies' (p. 259). The years of the COVID-19 crises have further emphasised the value of walking, or as Springgay and Truman (2022, pp. 171-172) conclude, '…as countless places have entered various stages of lockdown over the past 2 years, the capacity to walk has taken on new meanings', but, at the same time, the pandemic also 'has further exacerbated walking's inequalities… walking becomes an ethical and political accountability and responsibility for how we walk, who walks, and where we walk…'.

Walking methods have also been increasingly explored in adult education, each offering unique benefits. Heijnen et al. (2022) found that walking interviews provided a richer perspective on place and practice in outdoor education. Bairner (2011) argues that there is a pressing need to re-assert the educational value of going for a walk:

> Walking the streets also provides us with insights into how other people live, and in particular, how they make use of urban space. It is on the street that we most directly experience what it is like to live with strangers… walking teaches us more than any other activity about the places where we live and the places that we visit (Bairner, 2011, p. 382).

Nevertheless, transformative methods are designed for use in adult education and are based on a profound theoretical understanding, which prevents them from being applied in any context or situation (Taylor, 2009). Taylor also emphasises that learning, including transformative learning, is always dependent on context; therefore, it is difficult to ascertain how much the learning environment influences the outcome.

Wolff and Ehrström (2020) provide examples on how sustainability is implemented in four university courses, three in Finland and one in Germany. In all four courses Wolff and Ehrström (2020) described, they strived to awaken students' curiosity as well as their active self-criticism. They also wanted to encourage participants to broadly and critically explore the field of sustainability and continue exploring the topic, particularly from views that are relevant to their continuous studies and future duties. In these cases, the learning was more or less interactive, learner-centred, participatory, collaborative, and problem-oriented (Rieckmann, 2018). Since the sustainability topic is extremely complex and utterly urgent, lecturers cannot leave students to study the topics alone: '…we wanted to emphasise that interdisciplinary, even transdisciplinary approaches, authentic learning environments, and a focus on current topics like leadership illuminate the social dimension of sustainability' (Wolff & Ehrström, 2020, p. 4191). The methods employed were walk-centred. The following paragraphs elucidate the theoretical foundations of this

approach. Thereafter, the methodology is exemplified through the use of illustrative examples from Hamburg and Stuttgart, which were conducted with student groups.

Place-based learning and walk-centric methods

In traditional adult education settings, such as a lecture series, knowledge is usually imparted by experts, even in the context of sustainability issues. Although the audience can ask questions, the education remains 'one-sided' (Stimm, 2023, p. 67). There is no discursive negotiation of positions or bodies of knowledge. However, participation and deliberation – based on listening to experts; interacting with experts in classrooms; verbalising questions, concerns, or support; as well as following or reading sophisticated texts, charts, and figures – tend to strengthen the position of well-educated, well-situated, and well-positioned citizens. For other groups, this challenges their rights and possibilities to participate in an equal manner. In contrast, in this article, the discussion regarding social sustainability is situated in the space of action. This implies that different actors bring their questions and beliefs as well as their knowledge and positions into the public sphere. Their voices are heard and responded to. In this process of deliberation, something emerges in the situation – not merely different knowledge or a differentiation of one's own perspectives but an 'in-between' (Stimm, 2023, p. 60). This in-between emerges only through the coming together of different actors, their contexts, and their knowledge.

According to Szczepanski (2013), where education takes place is a vital didactic and pedagogical question, which emphasises the meaning of place in the learning process. In the context of deliberative democracy, it is also important to pay attention to where learning actually takes place, as this may influence deliberations and the learning process. Currently, even political scholars such as Prosser et al. (2018) note that 'in practice there has been an emphasis on design and the procedural within democratic innovation, while what is often lacking is detail on the pedagogy of learning' (p. 213). Learning to deliberate is core to our development as democratic citizens and instead of merely articulating viewpoints, a deliberative process also creates opportunities for these viewpoints to change (Curato et al., 2017). Thus, there is a need to develop deliberative methods that increase participants' learning of not only issues but also of participation itself. The literature on deliberations has rarely focused on actual learning processes, even though, for example, Hartz-Karp and Stocker (2013) suggest that learning is essential in deliberative democracy and as Sorkin (2009, p. 81) indicates, 'walking is not simply an occasion for observation, but an analytical instrument'.

Ehrström and Raisio (2014) saw the need for a more holistic approach and combined elements from Citizens Juries and Development Walks to create a new participatory method – Deliberative Walks. Therefore, they united two different participatory methods: one based on discussions and theoretical content (Citizens Jury), and the other observation-oriented and place-based (Development Walk). Deliberative Walks were introduced as a vehicle to learn in a more complete matter (Ehrström, 2015). Deliberative Walks make it possible to grasp the issue under deliberation in a more holistic manner. Ideally, Deliberative Walks could also make learning processes more equal, as individuals who have challenges in learning by listening to experts or reading information packages could also learn by seeing, observing, and feeling (Raisio & Ehrström, 2017): 'Deliberative Walks implies to plan with people, instead of planning for people, or over the heads of people' (Ehrström, 2020).

However, the examples presented in this article are variations of Deliberative and Development Walks. They were implemented with groups of students in Hamburg and

Stuttgart. Nevertheless, they can provide helpful suggestions regarding how deliberations on issues of sustainability and the transformation of cities can be implemented using walk-centric methods in adult education. First, we present the examples in order to examine different methodological approaches in a systematic manner and identify the methodological developments that have been made on this basis.

Community, place, and space of learning: Experiences from Hamburg, 2019

First, we present two examples of implementing walk-centric course elements in higher education. Both include a specific walk-centric or walk-including method as well as specific elements that could be characterised as either the main focus point and element of a course (the complexity of sustainability) or as a freestanding common element for three different courses (two-day weekend mini-studentlab Deliberative Walks). Both include a walk-centric deliberation and place-based learning context, but one case is a variation of Deliberative Walks while the other paves a way for bringing walk-centric deliberations to the cityscape at large, with various and different (inner) city districts as arenas for action, made possible by combining public transportation with walking and learning on foot.

The common feature of the University of Hamburg course elements (the complexity of sustainability as well as mini-studentlab Deliberative Walks) was authentic environments and a connection between local and global perspectives. Authentic learning environments are built on situated approaches and the idea that learning is best achieved in circumstances that resemble relevant and real-world contexts (Herrington & Herrington, 2006). The course examples indicate that sustainability courses can assume many shapes and that it is important to create conditions for social sustainability learning at universities. Wolff and Ehrström (2020) argue that it is an advantage to have many lecturers for the same course, but that this is not always possible. Bringing in guest lecturers may also be an option.

Heijnen et al. (2022, p. 529) argue that 'mobile research methods, comprising a range of research approaches that aim to gather data while on the move, allow for rich and situated encounters with the places and people in which outdoor researchers are interested'. They note that although outdoor education often occurs in dynamic, mobile settings, research in this field has predominantly relied on traditional stationary methods, which underutilize the potential of mobile approaches. Heijnen et al. (2022, p. 533) further argue that 'it is important to recognize the political and contested dimension of sense of place' and that the process that shape place meanings are, partially, 'driven by differing languages and potentially conflicting ideologies' (p. 533). The concept of place links individuals to locations through the establishment of mutual meanings, and, thus, outdoor education that is responsive to place should be attentive to the distinct needs of each area. Furthermore, the goals of place-responsive outdoor education should align with adjustments in teaching methods. To paraphrase Heijnen et al. (2022), mobile research methods and place-based learning methods with in situ observations offer researchers the ability to not only ask questions regarding the place but also questions in the place. 'Furthermore, the mobile act of walking itself allows both participant and researcher to engage with place in a direct and embodied way' (p. 543).

In 2019, Ehrström arranged a place-based deliberation with in situ-observations in education that exemplify how bringing deliberations to the streets and including in situ-elements in education can assume different forms and bring insights on different (geographical) scales. This can also exemplify changes in teaching practices, indicated

by Heijnen et al. (2022), for place-responsive outdoor education aims. In this case, by taking advantage of a wide urban public transport network to extend the geographical area covered in a Development Walk to that covered in a modified Public Transportation Walk. This pilot was organised as a modified one-lecturer version of The Complexity of Sustainable Development course in Lifelong Learning at the Faculty of Education, University of Hamburg, Germany, in 2019. The course essentially focused on two full-day seminars – the first on social sustainability connected to urban transformation and the second on popular culture and learning; the course also included traditional two-hour weekly seminars addressing the different pillars and definitions of sustainability, with a focus on social sustainability. Before the full-day seminar on urban transformation, organised as a walk-centric deliberation, in the inner city of Hamburg, each participating student was tasked to prepare a short presentation of one of the districts and a specific contested space or issue in it as well as to discuss the characteristics and specific place-based challenges for local-level social sustainability in that particular area. Theoretically, the emphasis was on place-based learning through a (structured) Development Walk during which the group visited seven inner-city districts with various characteristics. The idea was to present a varied map of the city in which different districts and places face varied challenges. Accordingly, the students explored districts from the newly built Hafencity to the traditional working-class St. Pauli, cultural and counter-cultural Sternschanze, wealthy University district Rotherbaum, and inner-city shopping districts (in Neustadt).

The structured and modified Development Walks method that was created for this course element was, in essence, a Public Transportation Walk, using public transport networks for longer distances among localities (both U-Bahn and S-Bahn). Seven interdisciplinary students participated in the pilot Public Transportation Walk and experienced several urban environments while discussing various place-connected social sustainability challenges. All students prepared presentations on a specific location and on specific place-related challenges at a selected contested space. As these presentations and discussions were held at the very spaces of deliberation, in effect, higher education brought deliberations to the streets, to the wider cityscape, for a more holistic understanding of both local-level and city-wide challenges. After each presentation, the walk leader positioned the presented and discussed local challenges and contested issues and spaces to a global context. During the course, and particularly in this walk-centric deliberation, the students experienced connections to the global in the local and the local in the global – that is, how global trends and phenomena connect to local ones, and vice versa. This was further emphasised in a follow-up seminar in class, in which experiences were discussed in greater depth as well as how the various transformation processes and district identities related to global trends.

Here, the discussion/group deliberation also did not follow directly after the walk-centric deliberation. Instead, the group discussed experiences from the in situ-observations in a subsequent seminar in class and then reflected over how the in situ-observations in different localities connect to global trends and social sustainability challenges. On the whole, organizing a city-wide and walk-centric deliberation/in situ-observation may be considered challenging. However, the rewards for organizing a Public Transportation Walk to different localities is worthwhile. First, an urban in situ-observation walk-centric deliberation provides space for a more general and wholesome understanding of the varied urban landscape as a whole, with its ongoing simultaneous and varied transformation challenges and opportunities. Arguably, this also increases the understanding of a city-wide sustainable development and combination of multiple varied challenges as well as various forms of urban transformation. The often-understated

connection among social, economic, and ecological sustainability challenges are also brought forward in a common, but also contested, urban cityscape with simultaneous and varying transformation processes.

However, this also creates challenges – first, on course planning, as it is not possible to organise everywhere, and all places are not accessible by public transportation within a realistic timeline, not even where public transportation networks are excellent. Thus, the included urban spaces need to be easily accessible by public transport and the time factor is essential, as public transportation will take its own time, including waiting at stations. Group size is another challenge, as public transportation and keeping the group together limits the number of participants in each group more than walking by foot. It is also important to consider providing everyone with an equal opportunity to participate in the course and field experience. In this case, all participants were university students and all of them had personal public transport monthly cards, which Ehrström considered an important prerequisite for organizing a deliberation by public transport. Due to time challenges – including dependence on public transport timetables, walking between stations, and the spots for deliberation – six hours was considered the minimum time required for such a deliberation; more specifically, it needs to be considered a full-day course element, including lunch break. In contrast, a traditional Development Walk (on foot) normally consists of two hours of walking and observing, with five to six stops along the route, followed by a common discussion/deliberation (usually another 1.5–2 hours). Informal discussions between stops while walking was more inhibited as 'walking' to a large extent involved moving by public transport and shorter walks to and from stops.

The course language was English and the participants were both domestic German and international students. In this course, an interdisciplinary approach was utilised mainly in lectures on the different pillars of sustainability and various definitions of social sustainability as well as two full-day seminars that focused on rather different topics (challenges related to urban transformation processes in different districts, and the social role of popular culture) and their connection to (social) sustainability challenges. Being the first pilot experience, more systematic analysis of student feedback would have been valuable. However, due to the small number of participants (seven), a more systematic analysis was not considered to be that meaningful and questionnaires were not utilised before and after the course. Student feedback was still essential and during the final course meeting, students were given the task to orally comment on the setup of the course, course content, and particularly the seminar on urban transformation and experiences of place-based learning in urban environments. The course administrator also did emphasise that all feedback, positive and negative, was valuable and important to consider when planning any follow-up course. All seven students' comments regarding the setup of the course were positive, particularly regarding the place-based course element (Public Transportation Walk). Even though the experiences were not systematically analysed, this is still valuable information.

Further, this course strongly focused on the social dimension of sustainability and, thus, mainly on the complexity of sustainability from a social perspective. Mainly concentrating on one dimension, but with introduction and awareness of the different dimensions of sustainability, may be a best-case alternative for one-lecturer courses, while a multi-lecturer version allows for a wider, more multidimensional and interdisciplinary handling of the very complex issues of sustainable development.

A few of the same students in the above course also participated in a larger (approximately 20 participants) Studentlab experience in Hamburg 2019 – also at the Faculty of Education, University of Hamburg – and was organised as a two-day course element for participants in three different master study courses. This, in turn, was a mini-

version of studentlab Deliberative Walks and a pilot experiment of how a studentlab Deliberative Walk would work as a course element and in a two-day version instead of a full course version. If a full course is too difficult to arrange, a course element or weekend exercise might be easier to include in the curriculum. Nevertheless, a two-day version (methodology and citizens' jury elements day 1, Development Walk and deliberation elements day 2) includes the same main elements as a full-scale studentlab Deliberative Walks (for this, see Ehrström, 2020).

A post-course questionnaire and written comments by participating students reveal that, as expected, the largest drawback and challenge for a mini (short) version is the (limiting) time factor; participants particularly found the deliberation element and conclusions stressful due to very tight time limits for group work and presentations, especially for reaching common conclusions, while all other elements worked well and the overall experience was positive. It is important to consider, if opting for a shorter two-day version, that sufficient time is divided among all elements of the deliberation. Higher education students will obtain an understanding of combining different learning methods and Deliberative methods in a two-day experience, but may be frustrated if deliberation and conclusion elements are hurried. This can be counter-productive, even though the overall experience of this pilot was clearly positive.

The student groups are not always diverse, and the environment can be the campus. However, as these two examples reveal, courses or course elements do not need to be constrained to campus and can also include a wider learning environment. It does not even have to be in close vicinity of universities, but can even be multidistrict oriented, if the infrastructure (like local public transportation system and access) and course planning allows for such alternatives.

Community, place, and space of learning: Experiences from Stuttgart, 2022

Based on these findings, we present the results of a student semester project in Stuttgart, Germany. Fourteen social work students at Ludwigsburg Protestant University of Applied Sciences were assigned the research project of identifying the needs and interests of marginalised groups in the midst of an ongoing transformation process in one of Stuttgart's inner city districts. The project is linked to the International Building Exhibition (IBA) 2027 that is currently being prepared in the Stuttgart region and will be presented to the public in 2027. Kersting (2021) notes that participatory tools have been developed in Germany due to the increased importance of sustainability in the public sphere and the demand for more direct and Deliberative forms of participation from the climate movement or nature conservation associations. Not surprisingly, the aim of IBA 2027 is to encourage participatory practices and foster dialogue among residents, urban planners, and policymakers to collaboratively establish a sustainable and inclusive urban environment. IBA projects and districts have been identified throughout the Stuttgart region to achieve this objective. An example of such a project is the urban quarter called Leonhardsvorstadt.

Leonhardsvorstadt comprises two distinct neighbourhoods separated by the Züblin parking garage. To the east of the garage lies the opulent Bohnenviertel, while to the west is Leonhardsviertel, commonly referred to as the 'red light district'. In comparison to the entire city, Leonhardsvorstadt reports a substantially larger percentage of individuals with immigrant backgrounds and welfare beneficiaries. In contrast, the district has a below-average proportion of children and young people as well as green and open spaces (Landeshauptstadt Stuttgart, 2020, p. 36). Moreover, the redevelopment or redesign of

the current Züblin parking garage area is planned as part of IBA 2027. This location is viewed as a 'key area' (IBA, 2023) and a future centre for the community with increased permeability between the two neighbourhoods.

Rolf Ahlrichs has been aiding the transformation process of Leonhardsvorstadt since the winter semester of 2020 by conducting theory–practice seminars for social work students in their third and fourth semesters. In the summer semester of 2022, it was decided to incorporate the method of Deliberative Walks. The method was selected for social work education as it combines community and social space orientation. The 14 students were divided into 4 research groups, each of which was tasked with investigating a specific target group and focusing on a distinct theme, including prostitution, safeguarded areas for women, and viewpoints of children and adolescents regarding the district. The groups were formed on the basis of the students' individual interests. The students obtained a better understanding of different living situations in the district as well as individual perspectives on social and political necessities. The primary research inquiry was how the area around the Leonhardskirche (a church) and the Züblin parking garage could become a space for the community and include marginalised groups. The results were documented via scientific posters, which were exhibited in the district and at a public event as well as in the academic community to introduce our research approach. A project report was created by the students to reflect on the research process.

During the seminar, the method 'Deliberative Walks' was presented for the first time. It was explained by Peter Ehrström that the full use of this method may not always be required, as the matter at hand could also be addressed through either a theoretically focused approach (citizens' jury) or a task-oriented technique (Development Walk). It was evident that implementing a full execution of the method during the seminar was impracticable due to time limitations. Consequently, the students elected to carry out Development Walks.

Initially, it was required that the students contact the target groups for their walks. The plan was to take walks through the neighbourhood, with four to five stops in which the experts provided information that focused on transformation processes in the neighbourhood, which were exemplified at each stop.

The first group of students focused on young children in primary school. They wanted to find out where these children play in the neighbourhood, how they navigate their environment, and what their preferences are for the neighbourhood. To engage with the children, the students chose to work with a youth centre and the local primary school. The students organised a walk around significant sites, such as the church, skate park, Züblin parking garage, school, and red-light district. Four children enthusiastically participated in the walk. Experts provided insightful ideas at each location, sparking lively discussions between the children and experts. Additionally, students utilised the time between sites for one-on-one conversations with the more reserved children. The students concluded that the research methodology served as a reliable tool for initiating dialogue with people who would not usually express their opinions. Children, in particular, are an intriguing cohort, as they are often consulted but rarely considered to be specialists in matters relating to a place. The discussions documented by the students suggest that the children explicitly communicated their expectations for the future of their neighbourhood and simultaneously provided insight into their needs. For the redevelopment of Leonhardsviertel, the children's priorities were mentioned to be safety in the neighbourhood, a park with sufficient green spaces and seating, designated areas for safe play approved by their parents, and safe streets where they can walk independently.

The second group conducted a survey of young people in the district. The research method was slightly modified and supplemented with additional techniques, including

the needle, photo, and neighbourhood inspection methods (Deinet & Krisch, 2002). The young people mainly determined the route of the walk, which was guided by the significant places they had identified using the needle method. During the walk, the young people were asked to use their mobile devices to take a picture of something that they felt best represented the place. Immediately, the individuals implemented the interpretation and identified the reasons for their selection as well as their personal associations with the visible elements. Initially, contact was made with several schools and youth organisations, but only young people from one particular organisation were present at the agreed meeting place. This highlights one of the complications of conducting research with young people. The walk was carried out by five participants aged between 14 and 18 years. In line with the abovementioned group, the locations visited during the tour included the Züblin parking garage, the skate park, a football pitch, the school, and the red-light district. At each station, there were different prompts and opportunities to stimulate central questions. Looking back, the students found the method fascinating and varied, although they highlighted the challenges of motivating young people to engage with this format and make commitments with them. However, the walk revealed certain positive connotations inherent in the area (such as a sense of familiarity) while also highlighting the existence of detrimental aspects (such as the prevalence of gang-related activity in the area), as well as high levels of police surveillance, particularly of young people. It was noted that young people were faced with a lack of adequate space or facilities.

The original plan for the third group of students was to take a walk with the police. However, this was not possible due to lack of permission from the police station management. Instead, the students resorted to the original methodological roots of Development Walks (Safety Walks) to highlight the safety of women in Leonhardsvorstadt. The study aimed to investigate the safety of women in a neighbourhood across a wide range of age groups. Women who lived in, frequently visited, or stayed in the district were encouraged to participate. The research question was related to identifying places in Leonhardsvorstadt where women feel safe or unsafe and the factors that influence their perceptions. In order to obtain meaningful results, the group of students decided not to specify the route but let the three participating women aged between 25 and 60 years determine it. The church (Leonhardskirche) was used as a starting point to discuss subjective feelings of safety. The women then visited places that they felt were less safe and then ventured to places that they felt were safer. Lighting was found to be important in creating a sense of safety, but litter, dark street sections, and visual obstructions, such as art or plants in public spaces, created insecurity. It is important to consider the presence of people in public spaces. Perceptions of safety differ between the red-light district, where large crowds and police presence contribute to a sense of safety, and the adjacent affluent residential area, which is perceived as unsafe due to the prevalence of lonely streets at night. In their project synopsis, the students reflected on the inequalities that exist in planning processes. They recognised Development Walks with marginalised groups as an important method of involving those without a voice in political issues.

The fourth student project group investigated sex work in the Leonhardsviertel red-light district. The students' practical planning included a theoretical discussion on sex work, exploring the district to identify the population groups associated with sex work, and contacting experts to provide input for discussions during the walk, with the aim of including different viewpoints. The students attempted to contact the sex workers through social workers at a counselling centre to encourage their participation. None of the local sex workers agreed to participate in the walk. However, the group managed to engage a

wide range of actors in the district who are either directly or indirectly involved in the issue of sex work. Two social workers who support sex workers in the area, two bar owners, a brothel owner, a member of the German parliament with roots in Leonhardsviertel, and a journalist participated in the walk. The stops on this walk were a counselling centre for sex workers, two bars, and a brothel. During the walk, very different positions on sex work were expressed. The atmosphere was characterised by a high level of emotional intensity, particularly in relation to the divergent political stances on the legal regulation of sex work. However, all participants agreed that the red light district should be preserved in the future, despite differing opinions on sex work itself.

The name of the ongoing transformation and planning project for the 'Neue Mitte' (new centre) area suggests a comprehensive process of transformation and gentrification. This is not desirable for any of the participants in the four student projects. Finding common ground and identifying a least common denominator can be a crucial first step in discussing the future of the neighbourhood. It can also increase the likelihood of addressing numerous challenges and creating opportunities to improve the social situation and local sustainability in a contested urban space, despite significant differences in local interests. The walks demonstrate how to tackle major challenges and find common ground. Action and effective communication can improve local social sustainability in a contested urban area. By bringing together different perspectives and working together in structured activities, progress and social sustainability can be achieved. Therefore, it is crucial to initiate communication and discussion regarding the common future of this urban space.

Methodological discussion

The starting point for the above examples in Hamburg and Stuttgart was Deliberative Walks (which includes Development Walks and Citizens Jury methods) and Development Walks methods. However, these methods were varied and modified in the student examples. In the following section, we present the differences between the methods presented and discuss the possible applications of these for adult education.

The use of different walk-centric and walk-inclusive methods in society can also be argued as to be like a ladder-like learning process, where democratisation and the interest to deepen participation by advancing to more demanding and theory-oriented deliberations increases the civic learning process towards active citizenship and informed participation in deliberative processes. The specifics of these three steps in the learning process ladder leads from more in situ-observation oriented to more in situ *and* theoretically oriented methods and are expected to be followed by a subsequent step of theoretically oriented deliberative methods, which are based on interacting with experts, stakeholders, and decision-makers. A step-by-step process increases the interest and knowledge to interact in these processes for more vulnerable civic groups that otherwise easily choose not to participate or are not invited to participate. In this manner, walk-centric and walk-inclusive methods may play a more structured role in the democratisation process in cityscapes.

The hypothesis for Development Walks is that the learning process is strengthened by in situ observations of specific situations and spaces. Simultaneously, complex planning issues, for example, are concretised. This makes Development Walks a *walk-centric method* rather than a walk-inclusive one. Interviews reveal that the learning process and knowledge of planning issues – specifically of the place itself – increased through the participation in this walk-centric deliberation. It was also a positive learning experience (Raisio & Ehrström, 2017). As a method element, in Deliberative Walks and

studentlab Deliberative Walks, the Development Walk element has commonly been regarded as the most positive one (Ehrström, 2020). Development Walks have been identified as an important method for citizen participation: 'One walk produced several suggestions for (re)development… A common walk gives the (participants) opportunity to discuss, recollect, and create new ideas' (Ehrström & Katajamäki, 2013, p. 76).
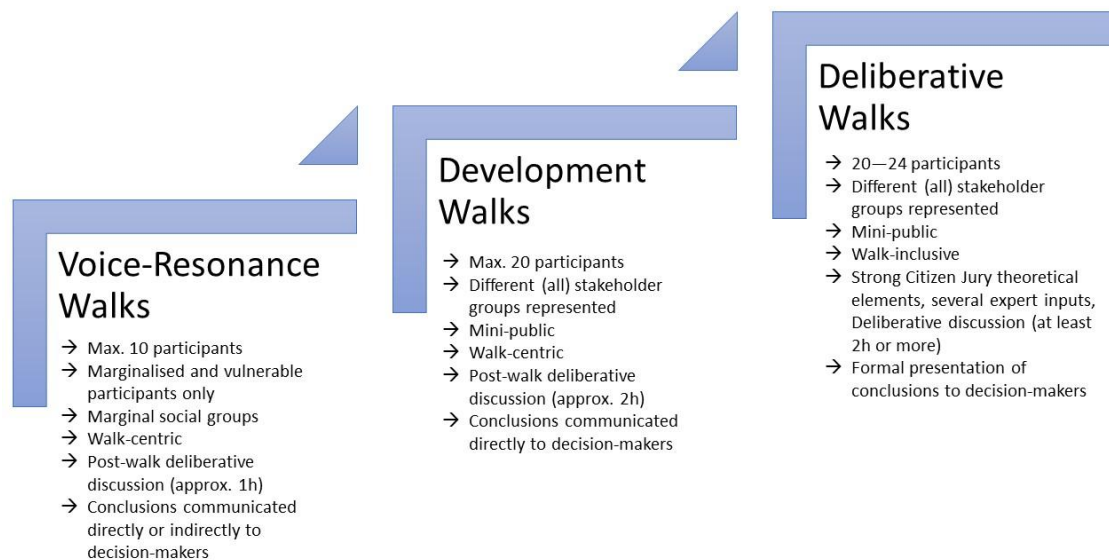
In contrast, the Deliberative Walks method is a *walk-inclusive method*, as it combines place-based in situ-observations (walk) with theoretical in-class elements (citizens' jury). However, the walk element in Deliberative Walks and studentlab Deliberative Walks have also been identified as the most important element for participants own learning processes (Ehrström, 2020). Based on these findings, it is argued that including a walk element in deliberations can lower the threshold for participation for more vulnerable groups in society. Then, a walk-centric deliberation is argued to lower that threshold for participation even further and is, therefore, considered a low-threshold entrance to participation and a civic learning process for inclusion and more active citizenship in transformation processes. Typically, a few representatives of planning authorities may also dismiss issues for deliberation as being too difficult and complex for ordinary citizens. However, Ehrström and Katajamäki (2013) argue that experiences from citizens' jury and Development Walks reveal that citizens are good at being able to have diverse opinions and creatively consider important questions if given the opportunity and structured procedures to do so.

In our scientific evaluation and analysis of the students' project reports in Stuttgart, it was observed that the walk-centric method had been modified through the students' projects. These modifications have influenced our methodology of walk-centric methods and the development of a method called Voice-Resonance Walks, which we define in the following manner:

> Facilitated by walk leader(s), group-specific participants proceed through a pre-defined route with a selected numbers of stops that are chosen based on both/either facilitator-led identification of critical stops and/or participant-proposed stops, record reflections, and discuss their surroundings, giving resonance to the arguments of others, after which participants develop common proposals for development, or least common denominator(s) that participants agree on, and communicate this to public officials.

In contrast to Development Walks, Voice-Resonance Walks focus on specific marginalised target groups whose voices are barely heard in political or public discourse. In the Voice-Resonance Walks, their voices find resonance – that is, they are heard and there are answers. This is a first step towards political participation. As visualised in Figure 1, Voice-Resonance Walks can also play an important role as an entry point for civic learning processes (to deliberate) for growing active citizenships and strengthen the participation of vulnerable groups in democratisation processes. The method Voice-Resonance Walks will now be trialled and further developed in various field studies. This is assumed to be a suitable method for accompanying transformation processes in cities, particularly by involving population groups that are otherwise barely represented in public discussions. However, resonance, only arises when their arguments are not only heard but also included in political decision-making processes.

Figure 1. Ladder model of walk-centric and walk-inclusive methods. Valuables: ideal group size, participants and groups, walk-centric or walk-inclusive, theory-elements, results. Source: authors' own figure

Voice-Resonance Walks
→ Max. 10 participants
→ Marginalised and vulnerable participants only
→ Marginal social groups
→ Walk-centric
→ Post-walk deliberative discussion (approx. 1h)
→ Conclusions communicated directly or indirectly to decision-makers

Development Walks
→ Max. 20 participants
→ Different (all) stakeholder groups represented
→ Mini-public
→ Walk-centric
→ Post-walk deliberative discussion (approx. 2h)
→ Conclusions communicated directly to decision-makers

Deliberative Walks
→ 20—24 participants
→ Different (all) stakeholder groups represented
→ Mini-public
→ Walk-inclusive
→ Strong Citizen Jury theoretical elements, several expert inputs, Deliberative discussion (at least 2h or more)
→ Formal presentation of conclusions to decision-makers

The examples from Hamburg and Stuttgart demonstrate how sustainability issues can be problematised and discussed using walk-centric methods. The process involves opinion-forming and deliberation, which can be applied to other areas of adult education. Although this particular case involved students, the methodology is transferable to other groups of people and civic learning processes.

Conclusions

The relationship among political engagement, social participation, and an individual's circumstances and access to economic, social, and cultural capital is complex. Unfortunately, socially disadvantaged groups often face barriers that make it difficult for them to engage in participatory processes, thereby limiting their ability to participate even when they are willing to do so. In this paper, walk-centric methods were described; in particular, Voice-Resonance Walks were found to enable marginalised groups to represent themselves in a standardised and low-threshold setting, as individual participants receive the necessary social support to reveal their concerns and articulate their interests. Adult education could play a key in supporting this process in the public sphere by organising and offering Voice-Resonance Walks. On the basis of positive experiences in such rather sheltered processes, marginalised groups can, as a next step, participate in further deliberation processes. In the process of social emancipation, social sustainability can be established and marginalised groups become an integral part of the community and a basis for collective responsibility for one's own environment is created. Taken together, these walk-centric methods and course elements contribute to creating an arsenal of methods that connect place, space, and learning, with a focus on urban (social) sustainability, an often overlooked and downplayed pillar of sustainability, both in society and education.

The challenges of the impending change are significant, and it is crucial to involve as many people and different perspectives as possible. In light of a wider understanding

of social sustainability, it is even more crucial to develop participation opportunities for all population groups and discuss common solutions. However, previous participation procedures frequently resulted in the exclusion of specific target groups. Therefore, in this article, we presented low-threshold walk-centric methods and discussed their variations; these variations are suitable for involving people in development processes, thereby turning those affected into participants. Thus, it is evident that adult education is required to accompany and implement such processes. In doing so, adult education makes a contribution to the democratisation and sustainability of society.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship or publication of this article.

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Studying the legacy of second-chance education in Flanders: The regional university and the professionalisation of adult educators

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Abstract

Every year, third-year bachelor students participating in a course on adult education at the University of Leuven (Belgium) conduct an interview with adult educators working within a particular setting of adult education, such as civic integration courses, detention education, etc. In this article, we elaborate on one particular case, viz., adult educators working in second-chance education for adults who still want to obtain their secondary diploma. We show how their profession as an adult educator can become a common concern for both third bachelor students of educational sciences and for adult educators in second-chance education celebrating in 2021 their 40 years of existence in Flanders. This means that our analysis in this article will also show how a university can become a place where the daily professional practice as adult educators, viz., their ambitions and doubts, ambiguities and contradictions, can fully materialize as collective study material.

Keywords: second-chance education for adults, civic university, citizen science initiatives, professionalisation of adult educators

Introduction

What happens when third bachelor students in educational sciences study the daily enacted profession in adult education together with the adult educators themselves? This article gives a retrospective account of such a study exercise with bachelor students participating in a course on adult education at the University of Leuven (Belgium). It is a course that focuses on theories and practices of adult education and which is part of the curriculum of the third bachelor in educational sciences. Students have the option to choose for this course, but it is not part of the compulsory curriculum that all students

must take. The bachelor in educational sciences at KU Leuven aims at a general introduction to educational sciences, and from the master onwards, students must choose between special education or educational sciences (formal and non-formal education).

In this article, we look back on one particular two-year collaboration with second-chance educators within the setting of this third bachelor course on adult education. In 2020 and 2021 students conducted biographical interviews with adult educators working within second-chance education. Leuven was the first city where second-chance education for adults was organized. One year after this first year of pioneering a professional Federation of second-chance adult educators was established and second-chance education very quickly started to be organized in various places in Flanders. The two anniversaries of 40 years existence, in 2020 and 2021, were an unique occasion for both the university and adult educators to address the question of how, over a forty-year period, second-chance educators in Flanders (Dutch-speaking region in Belgium) have come to understand their profession and in doing so, study the legacy of so many years of professionalisation within this specific setting of adult education.

In the first part of this article we present some key figures on second-chance education in Flanders and elaborate on the kind of research-teaching practice we developed together with third bachelor students and adult educators. In the second part of this article we discuss what the key issues are in the professionalisation of second-chance educators, based on the analysis of 15 interviews with second-chance educators. In the third part of this article, we reflect on how this research-teaching practice is one of many attempts to experiment with the public role of universities today and in this particular case, become (again) a place for imaginative forms of knowledge that address key issues of adult education. It challenges both students, adult educators and academic scholars to collaborate and contribute to a university where the daily experiences of adult educators, viz., their ambitions and doubts, ambiguities and contradictions, can fully materialize as collective study material. The key question that this research-teaching initiative touches on is what Olesen (2006) and many others (West, 2020; Kreber, 2015) have already posed as an important concern: how both research and the profession of adult education can move beyond abstraction and neoliberal ideology.

Studying the legacy of second-chance education for adults within the setting of the university

Second-chance education in Flanders addresses (young) adults aged 18 and over who did not obtain a secondary education diploma during their compulsory education period, which is internationally equivalent to an ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) level 3 or 4. A review of international policy documents and academic literature that examined educational provision for low-skilled adults in European countries (Boeren & Whittaker, 2018) shows seven forms of education for adults with limited formal education, with 'second-chance education' occupying a distinct position alongside categories such as basic education and post-secondary vocational education and training (VET). In not all European countries (Eurydice, 2015), second-chance education programs leads directly to a certificate. Students have to take a central exam (e.g. in German-speaking region in Belgium, Finland, Poland or Slovenia) and in the UK, for example, second-chance education can prepare students to take General Certificate of Secondary Education (GSCE) or the A-level exams (again) and thus gain access to higher education. In Flanders, second-chance education differs from regular schools in terms of organisation and didactics. They differ, for example, by their personalized teaching programs, they are organized in Centres for Adult Education and they also offer flexible

learning pathways. Another special feature of second-chance education in Flanders is that they can give successful students a single or double accreditation which is accepted as merits for certain skills needed on the labour market and/or allows students to continue studying within the regular higher education system. As our analysis will show below, second-chance education in Flanders was initially focused on women over the age of 40 (Raes, 2008) who still wanted to obtain their diploma after raising their children. Compulsory education up to the age of 18 only started in Belgium from 1983, and so until today, in the older part of the population (55-74 years) 37.1% have only obtained an ISCED 0-2 in Belgium. According to the EU Labour Force Survey (Eurostat, n.d.), 21.6% of all adults aged 25-64 in the European Union, have a maximum education level below ISCED 3, representing 51.5 million people. Big outliers are Portugal (47.8 %), Malta (44.8 %), Spain (38.7%), Italy (37.8%), Greece (23.2%), but also Belgium (21.3%), Romania (21%), Luxembourg (20.7%) and the Netherlands (20.4%). Research shows how within second-chance education in Flanders there is a gradual rejuvenation of the student population but also that diversity of ages remains to this day an important feature of the student population within second-chance education in Flanders. Around 60% of enrolled students are younger than 25 years old and around 30% are within the age of 31 to 50 years old and 6% are at the age of 51 or older (Raes, 2008; Monteyne, 2021). While students in initial education almost all live with their parents or another care figure, 38% of students in second-chance education still do, while the same percentage of students in second-chance education (39%) live with a partner (with or without children) (Monteyne, 2021).

As we have already mentioned in the introduction to this article, second-chance education in Flanders already exists for more than 40 years. In the preface to the celebration book on 40 years of second-chance education in Flanders, Dirk Van Damme (Former Senior Counsellor Directorate for Education and Skills at the OECD) reflects on how school education is a big tanker struggling to adapt to the atypical life courses many young people and young adults are experiencing nowadays and how this has far-reaching consequences in terms of job opportunities, income, health, participation and much more. This is why 'second chance education' is so relevant and topical and why the notion of 'second chance' is 'an expression of elementary justice: adults who, for whatever reason, have missed out on opportunities during pre-arranged educational paths are entitled to a fair second chance. It does not matter whether they missed the first chance due to external circumstances or to their own decisions' (Dirk Van Damme, our translation in Federation for second chance education Flanders, 2021, p. 5).

As we will elaborate below, it is this life-changing or emancipatory power of adult education that we choose to focus on in a third bachelor's course on adult education in a specific way: by reading adult education literature together but also by doing biographical interviews with adult educators. In the first part of this course, students study texts written by authors everyone in the field of adult education has heard of and still frequently refers to. Often, however, these authors have become so well known that their theoretical basis on what the specific emancipatory power of adult education may actually entail is no longer widely discussed or even read. So, each year we give a voice (back) to a number of books and theories in adult education, such as the learning principles of 'andragogy' according to Knowles (1980), the importance of 'critical learning' according to Brookfield (2005), the 'situated learning of a community of practice' according to Etienne Wenger (2008), the 'transformative learning' according to Jack Mezirow (1978, 2012), 'biographicity' as an important adult source in education according to Alheit (1996) and Alheit & Dausien (2002) etc. A post-humanist reading of adult education practices (Fenwick & Edwards, 2013, 2014) is also covered in this course and where for example

the performativity of online platforms, specific software, classroom furniture, etc. is scrutinized along the active role of teachers, trainees, policy makers etc.. In the second part of this course, following the lectures and reading seminars on these guiding theories of adult education, the students are asked to engage in an interview with an adult educator about the educational work she does with adults. The topics of this interview are inspired by the biographical research tradition (Kelchtermans, 2009) but also questions on the role of materials and material setting are added to the interview template. With this interview, each students invites an adult educator to narrate the kind of events, people, settings and materials have formed and are still constituting their professional lives. The interview itself is structured in three parts. The first part of the interview focuses on the motives and circumstances that were involved in the choice to become an adult educator. In the instructions accompanying this first part of the interview protocol, we advise bachelor students to use sub-questions to probe into the kinds of emotions that were at play at that time: were they hesitant about this choice or was it actually very clear that they wanted to work as an adult educator? Were the first years of teaching in line with their own expectations or did things turn out quite differently after all? In the first part of the interview, adult educators are also asked to share their thoughts on the kind of changes they have experienced with regard to who has attended adult education over time, the kind of learning materials they have used, the digital support they got over time, the kind of school building(s) they have worked in and so on. The second part of the interview zooms in on how adult educators have addressed their teaching over time. What are moments of pride and moments of disillusionment for them? Who or what has contributed to these moments? In the instructions accompanying this second part of the interview protocol, we advise bachelor students allowing moments of silence and to reflect together on the key skills and attitudes that are important to them as adult educators. In the third and final part of the interview, we focus on the social contributions adult education has to offer and how adult educators perceive and value policies related to adult education. In the instructions accompanying this third part of the interview protocol, we advise bachelor students to encourage teachers to describe concrete situations and also to encourage adult educators to give concrete suggestion on how adult education related policies should change. The focus of the entire interview protocol is also discussed during one workshop with bachelor students and the questions are also tailored each year specifically to the setting where the adult educators are working. Over the many years of this course on adult education, we have been able to conduct interviews with adult educators working in detention centres, refugee integration centres, adult literacy courses and second-chance education.

Once the interviews are completed, students, in groups of four, analyze how assemblages of people, events, settings and materials have made up the professional life of adult educators. Students are asked to report their analysis in the form of a brochure and poster, and the role we take on as lecturers and teaching assistant is that we address students as researchers. We offer them the structure of three successive workshops and we move from group to group to co-support the discussion. During one workshop, students participate in deciding the specific layout of the brochure and poster. In two more workshops and in groups of four, students discuss with each other the kind of analysis they want to present using the following three headings: (1) an appealing presentation of the narrative or learning history that adult educators told them during the interview; (2) an analysis of how adult educators described their teaching practice. Students are asked to analyze this narrative on teaching practices using two crucial concepts that each student can choose from two adult education texts they have studied during the lectures and reading seminars in this course; (3) an analysis of how adult educators critically reflect

during the interviews on the kinds of contributions they can make to society and an assessment of how they are supported in doing so. At the end of the course, all groups presents their analysis to an audience of adult educators and in doing so, they articulate an answer to the following straightforward question: how do adult educators reflect on their profession and on the specific contribution they can make to adults' lives.

The audacity of a minor pedagogy in second-chance educators in Flanders

The analysis below is based on interviews with 15 second-chance educators and which are part of the 25 interviews bachelor students have conducted during the academic year 2020-2021. All the interviews with adult educators were digitally recorded and bachelor students transcribed one interview each word for word, including both verbal utterances and non- and para-verbal behavior to minimize loss of biographical narratives. With our selection of 15 interviews, we set the condition that the interviewed adult educators had all been teaching for at least 15 years within second-chance education. Nine of the selected teachers have been teaching since the very beginning of second-chance education in Flanders and six teachers started teaching twenty years ago. In the selection of the 15 teachers, we equally chose to include the experiences with second-chance education in eight Flemish 'cities' (Leuven, Mechelen, Hasselt, Kortrijk, Antwerp, Roeselare, Genk and Vilvoorde).With the analysis below we give an insight into how 15 adult educators narrate on their professional life in second-chance education. The three steps that we followed in our analysis make a comparative analysis possible of how this professional life developed during the 40 years of second-chance education in Flanders. In a first step of the analysis we reconstructed the 15 careers of adult educators, based on all factual data that was given during the interview and also on the short questionnaire that each adult educator completed in preparation for the interview. In a second step we analyzed these 15 careers of adult educators by using a limited set of codes (key or vital events, persons, settings, materials, …), exploring the biographical dynamic and the materiality of the professional life of these adult educators. In the third and final step, we examined how each adult educator understands his or her profession, including task perception, professional craftmanship and future perspectives of these adult educators. Based on the first two steps we could connect this professional self-understanding to the specific settings of second-chance education and thus also to the events, turning points, persons, materiality and policies that helped to shape these settings during 40 years of second-chance education in Flanders.

Fifteen adult educators narrate in an interview with bachelors how people, settings and events has shaped their professional practice over the 40 years of second-chance education, first in Leuven and later on in several Flemish cities. These interviews offer a rich description of the particular circumstances under which second-chance education emerged in Flanders. It is the late seventies and women, inspired by the emancipatory ideas of May 68, regularly meet within the Folk High School in the city of Leuven. A study trip to a school in the Netherlands where mothers attend classes in the same school building as their children led to an 'eureka experience'. At that time in Flanders, housewives didn't have the opportunity to go back to school and still get a secondary education degree. At the Folk High School, completing a degree was not an issue and its teachers told housewives that they could make valuable contributions to society even without a degree. But many of these working-class housewives had witnessed the May 68 student demonstrations and had shouted to the students *go back to school, you girls are capable and allowed to do so*'. Many months after the study trip to the Netherlands,

a group of women in Leuven were able to make this second-chance school for adults also possible in Leuven. The records of the discussions between the city council of Leuven and these women, show how a lot of courageous perseverance was needed to make this change towards education for all adults and thus also for women happen.

> I will never forget that conversation and the first response we got. He said in a sneering tone: 'But madam, please make sure that your husband gets his soup at his lunch'. To which our reply was: 'we've been doing that for years' and to which his second advice was: 'then go and have a cup of coffee with your girlfriends'. We persisted and said: 'Sir, we are here for more serious matters. We would like to get classrooms and equipment free of any charge from the city'.

In the early years of second-chance education in Flanders, there was little or no budget to pay adult educators a full salary for their work. Many of them received a modest living wage within a then-existing regulation for long-term unemployed people who were willing to return to work. In those days, it was also not easy to find sufficient and good classrooms. The title chosen for the jubilee book of 40 years of second-chance education in Leuven is 'Making school together'. This book contains many photos of the very different buildings that have hosted second-chance education throughout the years, e.g. an old convent building, a music conservatory, a shabby grammar school building, etc. But today, second-chance education in Flanders is part of large adult education centers and in Leuven this center is situated in one of the business zones of the city. Adults of all ages and backgrounds can attend there courses on a variety of subjects related to professional education, leisure education and second-chance education. In the interviews the older adult educators point to an important consequence of working in these large adult education centers. They indicate how difficult it has become to meet colleagues during breaks and talk to each other in a more informal way about teaching and profession-related issues. Even the number of formal meetings where adult educators can talk with colleagues has been reduced to a minimum, and it is no longer clear what the agenda of such a meeting among colleagues might be.

> In the past, we had weekly meetings with all our colleagues and during these weekly meetings we literally made school together. With the increase in scale of our organization, the frequency of these meetings decreased. It became less and less clear what we still had a say in and what we could therefore discuss with each other. Now, the experience is that we are part of 'a very big organization' and have ended up in the position of executors.

During the interviews adult educators comment on how they come to operate in an environment where the stakes of becoming an entrepreneurial self are very high, both for adults taking courses as for adult educators teaching these courses. They refer to counsellors and employment consultants who are now present in these centers for adult education and who give advice on how adult education can help students to keep pace with what society expects of them in the labour market. Yet, the metaphor many adult educators use to describe their profession is that they go on a study journey with their students. They search for ways to bring the world into the attention of students and encourage students to encounter this world together. During the interviews adult educators emphasized that they don't experience this study journey as a challenge that each student has to conquer as an individual. Instead, they understand this study journey as a two-way pathway: building knowledge and capacities as individuals and, at the same time, building a commitment to a world worth living in together.

> Students who are asked to engage in a group assignment on math's and for some of the students this also means that they break through the social isolation in which they got

> locked. … A student who is not fluent in Dutch is asked to read aloud in class and the other students are called to contribute to a class atmosphere in which this slower reading can be part of how this class is learning together…. A student can tell the stories of his grandparents on the war in and around Palestine in a history course and students are asked to articulate what living together with people of different religions can actually entail ...

What equally emerges from the interviews is that adult educators are well aware of how they are involved in many small gestures and how these small gestures are crucial for the education with adults. During the interviews adult educators reflect on how what second-chance educators do and say can open up adults' lives in very different directions.

> For one student, it may mean that she can finally look for another job, for another student it may mean that she immerses herself in literature, for another student it may mean that she reads the newspaper more often, for yet another student it may mean that she decides to continue her studies at university, etc.

It is precisely because of this openness, which at the same time requires attention and commitment of both the students and the adult educator, that second-chance education is characterized by what Fenwick (2006) has called the audacity of a minor pedagogy in adult education. A key aspect of this audacity, as the transcripts of the interviews show, is that second-chance educators persist in uttering one of the following phrases more than several times: *'please, try' or 'please try again' or 'maybe you can try it in this or that way'*. Eventually what matters, is that adult educators give a second and even a third or a fourth chance. This is what many school teachers also do: 'to express the belief that everyone can learn everything' (Simons, 2022). Second-chance educators reinforce this belief and in doing so, they do not ignore students' past, but make it possible that traces of that past no longer cast a shadow on students' abilities in the present (Simons, 2022).

At the end of the course the bachelor students presented their analysis of the interviews in groups of four to an audience of adult educators. A key topic that emerged in these presentations are two very different forms of vulnerability that are part of how adult educators narrate on their profession today. First, there is a formal or political vulnerability and which is about how to survive in times of performativity with its exclusive focus on effectivity, strict standards and output measurement. A second aspect of this professional narrative of adult educators is about an existential form of vulnerability and appears to be a characteristic feature of the way adult educators are involved in their teaching practice. It is about the day-to-day experiences that what is happening in teaching is 'both more and less than one had planned for' (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 267). What these presentations showed is how this existential form of vulnerability of adult educators should be understood as a structural condition of adult education. In the discussion following these presentations, an important concern came to the fore: how second-chance educators find themselves in a double-binding situation. They experience that adult education is increasingly embedded in a policy discourse that strongly argues for a functional and economical approach of the profession of adult educators. What matters in this approach is that adult educators are capable to respond flexibly to the needs of adults and effectively support them in acquiring the necessary skills to find a job in the labor market. Yet, this research-teaching initiative sparked a reflection on how second-chance educators are equally involved in many small and emancipatory gestures. Making students within second-chance education read a newspaper or practice the grammar of a foreign language, having them discuss the history of the war in Palestine together, for example, are all important but nevertheless 'small' educational gestures. They do not create clear signposts of what students should become after graduating from second-chance education. Moreover, rather than starting from well-

diagnosed needs or specific social outcomes to be achieved, these gestures draw on what Manning (2016) understands as an 'immediation force', that is a force that generates a sense of heightened affect or maneuverability in a world that holds very specific expectations on what adult life should look like. It is a force that can alter 'the valence of what comes to be' (Manning, 2016, p. 6) and has to do with an experience that adult education encourages each and every adult to contribute in his or her specific way to a democratic society. Acknowledging that these small gestures are part of an existential vulnerability of adult educators is 'not an alibi for lousy lesson plans, careless interventions or technically bad teaching performance. On the contrary, only carefully prepared and professionally enacted teaching allows the unforeseen and meaningful to happen' (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 267).

The regional university and professionalisation of adult educators

In the third part of this article, we reflect on how a research-teaching collaboration between universities and adult educators working in nearby practices of the university can enrich reflections on the profession of adult educators. The distinction Egetemeyer and Käpplinger (2011) make between quality management and professionalisation as two distinguishable logics in adult education is crucial in this respect. In their analysis of the European report on the 'Key competences for adult learning professionals' (Research voor Beleid, 2010) they indicate how the logic of professionalisation is easily sacrificed for the logic of a quality management approach. A quality management approach drives on written guidelines, mission statements and fixed goals and governs through the formalization of benchmarks and standards. It is a logic that optimizes the organizational capacity to deliver a product according to predefined performativity criteria. This key focus on standardization and formalism makes this approach different from the logic and issues that a professionalisation approach is concerned with, driven as it is by professionals who try to act and think from an adult education perspective. The reference point of reflection within a professionalisation approach is not an organisation, but the actual teaching practice where an adult educator responds to the situations in which she finds herself in. This professionalisation approach captures what Evans (2008) has called 'enacted professionalism' which has a focus on how the profession of adult educators emerges and becomes visible in their actual teaching practice, reflecting both their expertise and commitment to educational issues.

Based on their analysis, Egentemeyer and Käpplinger (2011) argue against mixing the two logics and to avoid having a profession be assessed only according to the logic of quality management. Freidson (1986) makes a related argument about the importance of what he calls a third logic of professionalisation and how this logic is different from both a free market logic and a rational-legal bureaucratic logic. The observations Freidson (2001) makes is that, in the minds of both bureaucratic managers and free marketeers, professionalism tends to be treated 'as an aberration rather than something with its own logic and integrity' (Freidson, 2001, p. 11). For Freidson, professional associations can create a set of institutional conditions in which it becomes possible to cultivate this third logic of professionalism through certain values, knowledge and services. In the initiative this article discusses, it is instead the university and, more specifically, a group of students and a lecturer who, together with adult educators, study 40 years of professionalisation within second-chance education. What is at stake in this research-teaching exercise is how an academic course on theory and practice of adult education can become a place where the daily engagement of adult educators viz., their ambitions and doubts, ambiguities and contradictions, can fully materialize as collective study material. We can only briefly

discuss how universities, along at least two different paths, contribute to the profession of adult educators. This brief and more general note is meant to raise the question how the research-teaching exercise on second-chance education is part of this second and more regional approach of how universities can contribute to the further professionalisation of adult educators.

A first and perhaps the most common practice of universities today is stimulating professionalism through the improvement and accurate application of evidence-based expertise. Universities are seen as the producers par excellence of solid and up-to-date knowledge to combat the questions and problems of 21st century society. It is quite recently that policy documents explicitly define the mission of universities in terms of producing a highly qualified workforce that meets the demands of industry, the market and the public sector (Rider et al., 2014). Training professionals involves learning to improve the predictability of their own actions as professionals, while focusing on delivering effects or products according to well-defined quality standards. Such a focus on professionalism as a quality management issue of organizations has weakened other approaches to professionalisation and this is particularly the case for adult educators. In their research on the current European discourse on lifelong learning, for example, Egetenmeyer and Käpplinger (2011) examine how New Public Management has become a powerful tool in thinking about the education of adults as a learning market to be managed according to economic principles, such as competitiveness, cost efficiency, quality frameworks and consumer-centred service delivery. What this quality management approach lacks is the ability to foster a reflection on issues that are considered important from a professionalisation approach, such as for example:

> a discussion about whom quality is meant for and what are the real objectives in daily practices. Is quality meant for the government? Or for learners? Or for enterprises? Are the needs of these different stakeholders in adult education identical? How should we deal with different interests? Is there a hierarchy of needs, meaning that some needs are more important than others? (Egetemeyer & Käpplinger, 2011, p. 27).

Rubenson and Elfert (2019) equally examine how academic research on adult education 'finds itself in a precarious situation' (Rubenson & Elfert, 2019, p. 24). It has a weak disciplinary core, and two particular features of academic research suffer from a lack of focus on how adult education actually unfolds on a daily basis: the huge drive for evidence-based policy research on lifelong learning on the one hand, and the merit system itself for academic research on the other.

The proposal of this article is that this trend can be bent. A university course where biographical reflections of adult educators are stimulated through interviews and where re-reading classical theories of adult education happens together with practitioners is one way to do this. It involves a much broader and ongoing quest to engage as a university in regional study practices that works with the site-specific people, issues, materiality's and discourses in its surroundings. Universities have always been a hub or a concentration of intellectual life in a region but with the rise of global rankings many universities compete for position on a scale where worldwide prominence is pitted against regional affiliation. In contrast, universities seeking to serve the public good are increasingly recognizing the region as a source for 'fostering a scholarship that breathes the air of the region, of its people and their history, memory, communities and environment' (Ingold, 2020). This quest of universities for regional engagement has so far focused mostly on sustainable development goals, in-service learning projects or citizen science initiatives. The argument of this article is that a regional course on adult education can cultivate a

sensitivity to the everyday engagement of adult educators working in proximity to the university and so contribute to the further professionalisation of these practitioners.

To further underline the importance of this form of sensitivity and reflection on adult education practices, we turn to some key findings of Bowl's (2017) research. Via interviews Bowl explores how adult educators in UK and New Zealand try to exercise agency within current policies on lifelong learning. In doing so, Bowl examines how adult educators try to cope with the double-binding situation that was also highlighted in the discussion we had with second-chance educators in Flanders. The adult educators interviewed by Bowl indicate that the overall experience is that they have no choice but to accommodate to the expectations imposed on them by lifelong learning policies. They also indicate that they try not to get overly frustrated in pursuing certain measurable outcomes that are put forward by these policies. Bowl's research shows then how difficult it has become for adult educators to think and act beyond these measurable outcomes. Even when they do try to resist via small tweaks, adult educators live, according to Bowl's (2017) analysis, in the cracks of adult education. However, Bowl (2017) also notes that during the interviews, some of the adult educators talk about how they try to persevere in doing educational work with adults and how they try to respond to the many moments when important issues such as, for example, what is emancipation for a particular group of adult students emerge in their daily practice. A rather pessimistic reading of these findings is that these few adult educators seem to be mostly older adult educators who will soon retire and who can still draw on a past where emancipatory practices of adult education were mainstream. A more optimistic reading of these research findings, which we would like to endorse, is that Bowl's research equally demonstrates the importance of a professionalisation logic that keeps adult educators focused to the educational issues that emerge in the adult education practices they are involved in. As already indicated, the image that many of the second-chance educators used to tell about their profession during the interviews with bachelor students is that they set of on a study journey. In their conversations and the exercises they make with second-chance students, the issues they are confronted with as a professional have a double focus or concerns (Biesta, 2022). It's about, first, the question of what it means to be an adult in today's society and, second, how adult educators can address this question of adulthood in an educational way.

We argue that a regional approach to an academic course on adult education foregrounds in at least four ways the importance of an openness of the university for the daily involvement of adult educators in educational issues (Kreber, 2015). First, a course developed on the basis of a collaboration between students and adult educators has an open-ended or non-pre-defined outcome. Both the process of studying together and the daily practice of adult education is the actual curriculum of the course. This means also, secondly, that the process of annotating and documenting the insights that emerge from the interviews and from the discussions bachelor students and adult educators have together can contribute to a living corpus of biographies, statements, key insights and concepts, citations, etc. In the research-teaching initiative at the university of Leuven we have already experimented with a variety of different public formats (e.g. a paper, a poster, a book, an exhibition, a blog) and this body of knowledge will still grow over the years that this course will be taught. Third, in making a course together with students and adult educators, it is important not to approach a region as a well-defined area nor to reflect on the experiences of practitioners from a so-called regional identity. Studying adult education at a regional university is not about making this kind of knowledge claims but involves a thoughtful attention to the iterative nature of adult education practices. The biographical interviews and the added socio-material focus in these interviews, allows for a reflection on how what adult educators do, say and relate to is always in flux (Kemmis,

2019) and emerges in a multitude of interactions between human intentions, policy discourses, technologies, school buildings, particular communities, etc. Hence, a regional university engages in a 'practice turn' (Schatzki, 2019; Fenwick & Edwards, 2013) within adult education theory and enables the study of adult education practices from an ontological perspective. Fourth, opening the university to how adult educators enact or practice adult education on a daily basis is in itself understood as an ontological opening or a significant event that can shake up established ways of being and thinking as an adult educator, university lecturer and student (Savransky, 2021; Stengers, 2021; Schildermans et al., 2019). Professionalisation of second-chance educators is in this study practice not seen as a problem for which bachelor students and adult educators have to come up with a solution together, e.g. a new assessment method; a new manual for instructing adult second-language learners, etc. Instead, discussing a minor pedagogy in tandem with reading together classical authors on adult education encourages a reflection on how key issues of adult education, such as what emancipation is, what critical learning is or what adulthood is, take on a very concrete and binding importance in the work of second-chance educators.

This regional course provides then both bachelor students and adult educators with a language that allows them to discuss and inquire into key issues of adult education and the many small but very important gestures adult educators are involved in. The mobilization logic of a quality management approach is so strong today that it has become almost impossible for many adult educators to dwell on and recognize how an important aspect of their profession are these many small gestures when trying to build an educational relationship with students. Re-reading theories of adult education along the biographical stories of adult educators contributes to a form of reflection in which adult educators can articulate how they are involved in a process of an intelligent habituation of one's professional environment (Dewey, 1980). What Dewey pointed out so well is that the formation of habits as a professional requires acknowledging both an undergoing and doing with everything and everyone in that environment. In Dewey's thought, the first movement that happens in the process of intelligent habituation is one of "undergoing' or surrendering to a practice. It is the movement from the environment to the professional, which then undergoes these influences and can, in a second movement, choose how to act. For Dewey, intelligent habituation is not about adapting to one's professional environment, as if the world in which a profession exists does not matter, but to form intelligent linearities between action and consequences that always remain open to the response of the environment. It is first and foremost a capacity to consider or imagine the full bearing of an event and is a way of thinking and doing beyond immediate outcomes, strategies or pre-defined quality criteria (Römer, 2012). It is only by a thoughtful action in the environment that the environment responds, and that response can inform the next action of an adult educator. In other words, undergoing requires that adult educators pay attention to what the people and the materials in an adult education environment requires. For Dewey, this thoughtfulness and attention is the intelligence that is characteristic for an educational experience as a professional (Snedden & Dewey, 1977), and thus the intelligent part of both doing and undergoing can contribute to the professionalisation of adult educators. Dewey (1944) gives the example of how a general at war, an ordinary soldier or a citizen of one of the warring nations have to think in a very particular way. All of them find it difficult to think about the war scene from a certain distance, as their actions are overdetermined by the urgent need to win and survive this war. The ability to restore meaning to what is going on beyond immediate interests requires the free exchange between an actor and a spectator who is not directly involved but supplement this distance with a commitment to stay with the situation and what it

portends in its particularities (Römer, 2012). During the biographical interviews and also during the presentation of the analysis of these interviews second chance educators can take this engaged spectator distance and reflect on their everyday acting with adults. It shifts the focus from very general criteria of quality to a language that can articulate the educational issues adult educators are facing and the many different small gestures adult educators are engaged in while responding to these issues.

Discussion and conclusion

This article is an invitation to further unlock the university's potential to be a place where students, adult educators and lecturers are challenged to turn the daily engagement of adult educators into a common concern and in doing so, to collaborate and contribute to the further professionalisation of adult educators. This kind of study practice calls for courage and imagination and is in line with a certain understanding of graduation that universities can promote. In her speech to newly graduated educators at the university professor Hellemans (2010) once referred to how doctors in Belgium take the Hippocratic Oath while graduating at the university. It is a vow or a commitment in which the newly graduated medical doctors declare to dedicate their life to the service of humankind and to act according to their best judgement and ability. The importance of this vow that is expected of newly graduated medical doctors shows that at least two very different conceptions of what makes a good doctor and, by extension, according to Hellemans (2010), also what makes a good educator are present in university curricula. First, a university curriculum is designed to equip professionals to be specialists in a particular body of knowledge and the prevailing quality criteria of that knowledge. Second, a university curriculum is also designed to enable professionals to recognise that, as professionals, they will often be forced to leave the safety of their expertise and profess what may be possible. This second notion of being a professional is about a commitment to surrender oneself to the concreteness of a situation and in doing so, to do justice to the people and a cause considered important in society. As the interviews show, for second-chance educators this is about persisting the belief that everyone can learn everything and make it happen that traces of the past no longer cast a shadow on second-chance students' abilities in the present.

As we already indicated, the main reason we also choose to read the so-called classical authors of adult education during this course is that these authors and their theories continue to express adult educators' commitment to important educational issues, such as the importance of critical reflection and democracy, the importance of transformative learning and biographicity etc. Yet, the aim of the analysis of the interviews with adult educators is neither to test particular theoretical assumptions, nor to develop a fine-grained critique about the dominance of a quality management approach in adult education today. The interest of this study practice we presented in this article is more modest and ambitious at the same time. It is an invitation to search for ways that can further unlock this commitment to educational issues in the profession of adult educators. In her analysis of the World Bank and the OECD discourse on lifelong learning, Elfert (2019) speaks of an unfailure of utopian visions in adult education, such as 'learning to be' (in Faure report, 1972) or 'learning to live together' (in Delors report, 1996). She borrows this concept of the unfailure of utopian ideas from social movement researchers in order to highlight both the limitations and the possibilities of prophetic visions, such as solidarity among all the people of the world or education for the betterment of both adult life and society. What Elfert's analysis indicates is that these

visions have failed in their impact on lifelong learning policy, but that they are still present in the way adult educators articulate the kind of educational work they do every day.

In the study practice with bachelor students, we took up the challenge to articulate this commitment: we invited both bachelor students and adult educators to reflect on what adult educators actually do, say and relate to while doing their educational work. This regional course blends teaching theory and doing empirical research in such a way that it becomes possible to articulate how the engagement of adult educators happens in the here-and-now of what we have called a minor pedagogy. This is about a skillful commitment to working with adults, materials and situations as they occur in day-to-day practice, and which makes adult educators reach out rather than retreat into preconceived quality rules or idealizations. In doing so, this minor pedagogy contradicts the quality management approach. Collecting and carefully analyzing these accounts of such an engagement of adult educators can stir up the emancipatory force of this minor pedagogy and can cultivate a sensitivity for the small gestures that are crucial in the profession of adult educators. In doing so, the university can become a place where both classical theories on adult education and the actual profession of adult educators are kept in a fragile and never closed order as they are exposed to the imagination and critical judgment of students, professionals and lecturers.

Declaration of conflicting interests

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Aims & Scope

The European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults (RELA) is a refereed academic journal creating a forum for the publication of critical research on adult education and learning. It has a particular focus on issues at stake for adult education and learning in Europe, as these emerge in connection with wider international and transnational dynamics and trends. Such a forum is important at a time when local and regional explorations of issues are often difficult to foreground across language barriers. As academic and policy debate is increasingly carried out in the English language, this masks the richness of research knowledge, responses and trends from diverse traditions and foci. The journal thus attempts to be linguistically 'open access'. Whilst creating a forum for international and transnational debate, contributions are particularly welcome from authors in Europe and other locations where English is not the first language.

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