

European Society *for* Research *on the* Education of Adults

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Dear ESREA members,

Massive blazes in Greece, Italy, Spain and Turkey, flush flood damages in Germany, Czech Republic and Poland and the fourth wave of covid-19 infections owing to the highly contagious Delta variant contradict the standard phrase “there is no news in August”. The ESREA news gathered in this newsletter are more optimistic: Next to a few tentative meetings in 2021, a number of conferences and network meetings are scheduled for 2022 with physical presence, among them the 10th Triennial Conference in Milan. Our Society is getting increasing attention in German-speaking scientific journals, as shown by interviews with the Chair (erwachsenenbildung.at) and the Secretary of ESREA (*Der pädagogische Blick*). Henning Salling Olesen delivers a historic looking back to the founding of ESREA by exploring its very nature and emergence “from the shadow” and Edmee Ollagnier takes a more personal view by addressing the issue of gender and women during ESREA’s development from the first steps in the early 1990s. Sometimes stories gradually become histories.

Take good care, stay safe and enjoy the rest of the summer!

Yours,
Alexandra



1. Emerging from the shadow?

Henning Salling Olesen

Former Chair of ESREA

ESREA has always researched the downside: the fringes of society, the informal part of the education system, marginally located in the academic institutions. The downside consists of what is repressed, unrealized or unrecognized. But exploring the back may also nurture a utopian notion of bringing this repressed to the front, into the light. Many historical processes are the result of some of the repressed protruding from the shadows and becoming visible. It may be more or less justified, and it is not always beautiful and clear when it comes out in the open. For me personally, it has always been a motivation to work in ESREA that it was an organization of a self-articulation, at the same time an exploratory process and a struggle for recognition. Looking at this process of emergence from the back one gets an understanding of the historical process that is underway.

First of all, ESREA was enabled by the process whereby Europe went from being only a free trade market only into gradually being a community, placing a European dimension in peoples professional and everyday life. The precursors of ESREA were networks that were partly called to life by the European Union and by European organizations within politics, culture and popular education. Many of the activities and the people involved in them were marginal in national institutions, and the European quest for international engagement provided a crack or a space in their national arenas in and from which something new could be organized.

ESREA organizes something which only happened while being organized. There were indeed - in some countries - small parts of regular chairs and study programs. But disregarding church institutions, targeted cultural transfer in the form of teaching was embedded in something else. Therefore, the intellectual preoccupation with the learning processes of adults was not at all directed towards education or teaching - it was rather a matter of philosophical and political considerations over history, culture and morals - the intellectual preoccupation with them was a practical reflection of life.

ESREA defined itself as a research organization, in a not very sharply cut demarcation in relation to, for example, the organization of adult education providers. Most researchers had a past and often also a present engagement in practical adult education of some kind. But we were also very conscious that if research should enrich the practice field independence and "arms length" were indispensable - although there was no power relations involved. Developing a research domain first of all meant theorizing and developing adequate methodology. The research in adult education and learning was borrowing in an unsystematic but very comprehensive way from simultaneously developing critical social and human science. In terms of general political and cultural orientation this was obvious, but it also at that stage was a marginalized and not very recognized field of research - no academic strongholds, no money from state or endowments. Later this was confirmed in the fact that those countries that had had academic institutions dedicated to adult education reduced or eradicated them.

Adult education was perhaps seen by some as just a continuation of the post-war modernization process. It seemed that the expansion of the education system in length and coverage in relation to rising generations would logically continue into the creation of institutional adult and continuing education. But just at this stage of late-capitalist process of modernization constituting it seems that the school based form of modernization process has reached a critical point, resulting in the turn to lifelong learning. Instead of a smooth institutional development we have seen since the 1980'ies a battlefield organized in hybrid of "school for adults" and societal functions that probably required and generated adult learning. One can especially mention three areas where this hybridization proved:

- The economically conditioned interests in adult learning led to increased political interest but also a prioritization of instrumental types of knowledge and skills, and a quest for a systematic investment in learning outside school, in work places etc.
- Adult education and community learning had the resources to be part of social technology problem solving in the restructuring of late capitalist society – learning providers that had been cause driven or had a particular cultural orientation were engaged in social intervention in cases where state reached its limits

- And adult education was also influenced by and became the bearer of new social movements - the women's movement, the peace movement, environmental movements engaged civil society in a combination of educational work and basic democratization process – potentially transforming a formal political democracy into more active, participatory forms

In these three areas, partly different and phase-shifted, the embedding of adult education in the processes of "real life" has led to struggles and contradictions which give research a privileged insight into historical change processes over the millennium. Rather than developing into a new institutional field with a new professional practitioner category - the counterpart to the school and the teaching profession - which could form the basis for a neat professionalization of research as a new academic discipline, the development in the research field, adults' learning processes, invited a continued critical community involvement. It is hardly overly pathetic to say that democracy on the one hand and the survival of the planet on the other are today determined by the learning processes of adults.

Meanwhile, the field of research has actually become more professionalized. The old amateurs who had a leg up in the field of practice have all died or retired. New generations of researchers who to a greater extent have a genuine academic recruitment and training have now filled the research area. Formalized researcher training takes place on a large scale, the publication has been largely shaped by the productivity requirements that are decisive in the academic world.

After all, this academic professionalisation is far from something distinctive of research in adult education and learning, it is rather the dominant development in academic work today. The exciting thing is whether the specific nature of research in adult education and adult learning can make use of the critical insights that can be gained from the special hybridization of the subject field.

2. Women and Gender in ESREA

Edmee Ollagnier

University of Geneva, Switzerland (retired)

ESREA represents something important in my life, not anymore on a useful professional point of view, (as I am retired) but it still inspires me emotionally and affects my feelings. As Agnieszka Bron wrote in the previous newsletter, my first meeting with ESREA's 'deciders' was in Manchester, UK in April 1992. Pierre Dominicé with whom I worked with at the University of Geneva in Adult Education, asked me to go instead of him. He was convinced that an opening to researchers involved in Adult Education all over Europe with such a project, would be a constructive way to help the advancement of research in our field, and in particular for Life History research, in which he was widely involved. Pierre had networks in the francophone world with Gaston Pineau who was in Quebec then Tours in France, and Guy de Villers in Belgium, but also in an English speaking environment with Jack Mezirow in Columbia University New York City. That's probably why the first ESREA's network meeting of the Life History and Biographical research conference took place in our University in Geneva in 1993.

For me, in 1992, more than 10 years after preparing a part of my French PhD in the United States, ESREA has been, before everything else, the opportunity to participate with an international English speaking research network, to discover others' realities, ideas, readings, writings ... and people. English speaking was sometimes an obstacle to communicate, frustration for the British, but I personally loved to be in this 'European English speaking' environment.

After several meetings in a small committee and few conferences, I found that the main organizers were all respectable male professors, and in my later years in ESREA, I even called them 'the old boys'. Progressively, women researchers from different countries joined the conferences, the networks and the Steering Committee and became active. For me, it is very important to notice that Laura Formenti was President recently and more women than ever are members of the Steering Committee.

I was running a regular seminar on gender and adult education at the University of Geneva, and I also and still belong to feminist activist groups in my city like the Women's World March. To participate at the Swedish conference on gender and adult education organized by Agnieszka in 1996 was the beginning of what became the most important time for me in ESREA: to give place and space to those gender questions. My strongest memory is of course in the Viking village close to Uppsala when Agnieszka, Barbara Merrill from England and I decided to try to convince the Steering Committee to let us create 'officially' a gender network.

To organize the gender network between 2000 and 2015 was a real pleasure, but also a challenge for two main reasons. The first one was related to different cultural understandings of gender issues in the network in relation to theory and methodology. But the network meetings were important for discussing different approaches to gender and coming to a collective design of the issues.

The second part of the challenge was related to the Steering Committee. Several times during our meetings, some members suggested to include the gender topic in another network. It has been the same debate as in my Faculty of Education when I was on the point to be retired: to include gender in something else, make it « transversal ». But this does not work ... yet ! In social sciences, including adult education, if no one insists on the specificities of gender questions, gender research will be lost to the future generations for their research. ESREA still has a gender network and it makes me feel good. I know that Joanna Ostrouch from Poland and Cristina Vieira from Portugal take care of it for now, and I hope new generations involved in ESREA will continue to give visibility to gender in adult education through network's meetings, research and writings.

My participation to the triennial conferences led me other memories, less intense, but reminds me of the great pleasure to meet researchers and becoming friends for years, with convivial times in between gifted speakers and deep discussions. For the networks as well as for the conferences, it has been such a luck to discover and access a little bit to a country, an area with its geographical and cultural specificities. Always too short, but healthy and pleasurable to compare to our local realities but also to realise the pressure of a daily academic life. I am still thankful to ESREA pioneers who have made the choice to organize time and space around topics and networks. It has been for me, and it is probably the case for the other researchers, the best way to take time and to really share and progress in adult education' research.



Gender and Adult Learning Network Conference in Montpellier, France 2011
From left to right: Barbara Merrill, Joanna Ostrouch, Edmee Ollagnier. [Private photograph]

3. Announcements - Conferences, Network Meetings and Call for papers

Conferences & Summer School 2021

August 29 – September 3, 2021 Denmark, Aalborg University

Summer School on *'International Perspectives on Education Policy'* (IPEP)

[Handbook](#)

September 16 – 18, 2021 Spain, Seville

ESREA Conference of the Research Network Between Global and Local – Adult Learning and Communities

Conference on *'Looking back for the future. Reconsidering adult learning and communities'*

[Call for Papers](#)

Oktober 21 – 22, 2021 Digital Conference

ESREA Conference of the ESREA Research Network on Education and Learning of Older Adults (ELOA) on *'Contemporary challenges of intergenerational education in lifelong learning societies'*

[Call for Papers](#)

Oktober 29, 2021 Digital Conference

ESREA Conference of the Research Network for Adult Educators, Trainers and their Professionalisation on *'Adult Educators in time of crisis: Well-being, Changes in Identity and Professional Practice in European Adult Education'*.

[Call for Papers](#)

Save the dates for 2022

May 16 – 20, 2022 Austria, University of Klagenfurt

Spring School for Doctoral Students on *'Research on Adult Education and Transformation: Mapping Possibilities and Embracing Complexity'*. It will take place at *University of Klagenfurt*, Austria, in collaboration with the Maynooth University, Ireland, and the University of Hagen, Germany.

For preliminary information, please click here.

June 27 – July 1, 2022 Austria, St. Wolfgang

Research seminar of the ESREA Network History of Adult Education and Training in Europe on *'Adult education and learning for social change in the 19th-20th centuries: Ideas, movements, and circulation of knowledge'*. The 12th seminar of the Network will take place in St. Wolfgang in Austria, where the network's third seminar in 1993, and the first ESREA triennial conference in 1995 were hosted.

[Call for Papers](#)

July 11 – 13, 2022 Portugal, University of Algarve

Conference of the ESREA Network Access, Learning Careers and Identities. More information will follow.

July 15 – 17, 2022 Portugal, University of Algarve

The Conference of the ESREA Network Gender and Adult Education on *'Gender and Adult Education in the era of social and cultural changes: (New) risks and challenges'* originally scheduled for July 2021 has been postponed for July 15 – 17, 2022 Portugal, University of Algarve

[Call for Papers](#)

September 29 – Oktober 2, 2022 Italy, University of Milano Bicocca

The **10th ESREA Triennial Conference** on *'New Seeds for a World to come. Policies, Practices and Lives in Adult Education and Learning'* will take place on September 29 – Oktober 2, 2022 at University of Milano Bicocca, Milano, Italy. This Conference will celebrate 30 years of ESREA activities and will gather together the ESREA community.

[Call for Paper](#)

4. RELA



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. RELA is published on behalf of ESREA and can be found at our webpage: <http://www.esrea.org/publications/rela/>

Current thematic issue of RELA: Widening the scope. Methodological and theoretical considerations on research in adult and continuing education.

[Call for Papers](#)

5. Publications

New publication

Bainbridge, Alan; Formenti, Laura; West, Linden (2021): [Discourses, Dialogue and Diversity in Biographical Research](#). An Ecology of Life and Learning. Leiden: Brill Sense (Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, 9). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004465916>

ESREA publications aim at providing in-depth insights on the diversity of current research on adult education in Europe in both geographical and cultural terms.

All publications of the **ESREA networks** can be found at: <http://esrea.org/publications/books-from-the-networks/>

All publications of the **ESREA Book Series** can be found (partially as open access) at the publisher's page [Research on the Education and Learning of Adults \(brill.com\)](#)

ESREA in the media

The Austrian magazine *erwachsenenbildung.at* has published a short portrait of ESREA and an interview with Andreas Fejes, Chair of ESREA. Please follow the [link](#) to read the article.

The German magazine "*Der pädagogische Blick*" published an interview with the Secretary of ESREA Alexandra Ioannidou about ESREA's tasks and future developments, see [Der pädagogische Blick | BELTZ](#)

6. How to become a member of ESREA e.V.

Membership in ESREA is open to individual and institutional members. As a member you will get a reduced fee at ESREA activities, information in the field of research on the education of adults through the ESREA mailing list and newsletter. As an individual member you have the right to vote at the general assembly that takes place each year (online through postal ballot). As an institutional member, all employees of your institution are entitled to participate in ESREA activities at a reduced fee. Note that institutional members have only one vote in the general assembly.

If you want to become a member the process is the following:

1. Download the document at: <http://www.esrea.org/about-us/membership/>
2. Fill in the membership application form and e-mail it to: ESREASecretary@die-bonn.de.
3. Within two weeks at the latest you will receive a confirmation of your membership by e-mail
4. An invoice for your membership fee will be issued: 50 Euros for individual members, 25 Euros for students and PhD students and 150 Euros for institutional members. **Payment of membership fees can only be made through an international or EU bank transfer. Cheques are not accepted. Any foreign bank fees are to be borne by the applicants.**

ESREA Bank details for membership fee:

Bank: Sparkasse KölnBonn

Account holder: European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA) e.V.

Account number: 1934820174

IBAN: DE73 3705 0198 1934 8201 74

BIC: COLSDE33XXX

VAT Number: DE324070933



[Private photograph]

7. Forthcoming newsletters

Deadlines for 2021

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