BOOK REVIEW


Reviewed by Judit Szabó-Tóth*

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One of the key issues highlighted by the book Remaking Communities and Adult Learning is that the primary objectives of adult education and adult learning, as perceived by policy makers, are largely focused on labour market training and skills development. At the same time, they often overlook informal and non-formal methods of learning that could serve the collective and individual development of society, and that could respond to major global problems such as climate change and environmental protection, environmental disasters, migration problems, populism and racism, gender inequality, social and economic inequality. The authors note that the book was written during the period of the CoVID-19 pandemic, and that in some chapters there are references to it. Furthermore, this period has also revealed additional problems that were not previously in the foreground, but which are present in human communities that play a key role in the construction of social structures. The authors posit that, since these problems are most visible at this level of society, it is here that the answers and solutions to these problems can be found, or can have an impact on or through the people living in these communities. The chapters in this book adopt a critical approach to adult education and adult learning, which demonstrate the capacity of communities to act in the face of local and global challenges and illuminate community learning from the perspective of those who can provide effective responses to them.

The authors of the book are members of the research network “Between Global and Local: Adult Learning and Communities”, which is part of the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA), a research network that operates in nine countries. The network provides a forum for researchers in the field of adult education and learning to explore and discuss theoretical and empirical research in the field and its changes, theory and practice. The results are presented at a conference every three years and published regularly in journals and books.

This book was published as the 11th volume in the ERSEA series Research on the Education and Learning of Adults in 2022. It offers valuable insights for anyone interested in adult learning, or involved in it at local or global level. Furthermore, it aims to inform the

*Doctoral Program on Educational Sciences, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary. E-mail: szabone.toth.judit@arts.unideb.hu, juditsabone.toth@gmail.com
development of lifelong learning policies in the European Union, UNESCO, OECD and national
governments. Furthermore, it is intended for all those who seek to address contemporary issues
through the collaborative generation of knowledge, or who are engaged in research or social
change initiatives. It may also prove beneficial for those engaged in participatory, emancipatory
social research, gender and biographical research, or those interested in research partnerships
between communities and universities.

The book is available in paperback and hardback formats, as well as in an e-book in PDF
format, which can be downloaded for free from Brill.com. It is comprised of 277 pages, divided
into four parts and 15 chapters. At the beginning of the book, after the table of contents, a brief
introduction to ESREA is provided, including an overview of the organisation’s purpose,
research areas, conferences, and publications. The reader may then find useful information
on the abbreviations used in the book. It will also provide information on the authors of the
book, including a brief description of their work to date, research areas, and professional careers.

The introduction, written by Evans, Kurantowicz and Villegas, provides a summary of the
purpose and content of the book, presents the background and sheds light on the topic outlined
by the researchers, thus offering the reader assistance in understanding the content and inter-
pretation of the book. The work includes both theoretical and practical methods supported by
empirical research.

The initial section presents a theoretical overview and a re-analysis of the works of authors
such as Paulo Freire, Shirley Walters, and Raymond Williams. It explores the potential of critical
democracy and popular education through four case studies. The initial section is entitled
“Popular Education Looking Back, Looking Forward”. The papers examine the role of participa-
atory research in adult education and community development in the creation and re-creation
of communities and, from a broader perspective, society. The title refers to the revisiting of
the work of the authors mentioned earlier and how these theories can be used in practice in the
future.

The first chapter, “Adult Learning and Mainstream Education Discourse” by Licínio C. Lima,
revisits the theory of Paulo Freire, a representative of the sign of critical pedagogy, in the
contemporary context, and compares the positions of official documents from the European
Union and UNESCO. In conclusion, the author argues that adult learning and education are
contexts of diverse communities where there are observable differences between members in
terms of culture, language, religion, gender, ethnicity, class or economic status. These differences
can also be a cause of discrimination, but they can also be the basis for adult learning and
education environments based on democratic, active citizenship, solidarity and cooperation.
Lima is critical of neo-liberal qualification systems that serve market economy goals, emphasis-
ing instead the importance of dialogical action and dialogical learning that focuses on democ-
racy, openness and sustainability.

The second chapter is entitled “Resisting Mainstream Lifelong Learning”. The author, Emilio
Lucio-Villegas, also refers to the work of Freire in his critique of mainstream discourses, to the
de-schooling theory in the work of Ivan Illich, and to participatory research, which he sees not
only as a method of working with adult learners but also as a means of creating new knowledge.
He drew practical examples of popular education from Central and South American models.

In the third chapter, Davide Zoletto’s “Lifelong Education in Diverse Communities” examines
the work of Ettore Gelpi, focusing on the novel cultural values created by diversity. These values
are linked to Raymond Williams’ definition of culture as the interpretation of everyday
experience. The author provides the example of the experiences of Italian emigrants living in Switzerland and Germany in the 1960s and 1970s. Zanier, alongside Gelpi, played a significant role in their integration, building on their expectations and resources.

The initial three authors of the inaugural section – Lima, Villegas and Zoletto – assess discourses and theories on adult education based on the work of preceding researchers. In the fourth chapter, Monika Noworolnik-Mastalska examines EU-funded education programmes and the challenges of citizenship education, utilising examples from five European countries (Germany, Poland, Hungary, Denmark and Spain). The chapter is titled “Is Active Citizenship a Forgotten Idea in Europe?”. The innovative practices examined focused on the acquisition of civic competences among disadvantaged pupils. Several problems were identified which hampered the success of the projects. These include the lack of involvement of participants, conservative attitudes in some countries, reduced funding for education, and a lack of awareness of the links between active citizenship and learning. This includes, for example, the need for society to respect the rights of the socially vulnerable.

In the context of the theoretical part, the remaining three parts of the book present the current situation from a practical point of view, placing the theories presented in the theoretical chapter in a contemporary context.

The second part is entitled Knowledge Democracy, New Pedagogies, Creative Inclusion. In this section, three papers are presented that focus on knowledge creation, the creation of new pedagogies, and their reception. In their paper “Co-Constructing Knowledge and Communities”, Walter Lepore, Yashvi Sharma, Budd Hall & Rajesh Tandon, authors of Chapter 5, conclude that the role of the individual in globalised supply chains has increased, increasingly displacing the belief in the role of communities in social transformation and change. This is leading to deepening social inequality and injustice, exacerbated by the CoVID19 pandemic. The concept of knowledge democracy is regarded as a powerful instrument, as it encompasses knowledge derived from various social movements and in diverse forms, including that derived from marginalised or excluded social groups and accessible to all. One of the studies presented examines programmes designed to support Community-university Research Partnerships (CuRPs). Another study examines the global context of where and how people learn participatory research. According to the authors, these research partnerships have the potential to mobilise the knowledge, tools and skills of universities and communities. The study offers guidance for the establishment of a knowledge movement and indicates that the generation of alternative knowledge based on local communities through collaboration may prove to be an effective long-term strategy.

In Chapter 6, Darlene Clover’s work focuses on the development of feminist pedagogy for the creation and development of women’s and gender museums. The paper is entitled “Women’s and Gender Museums”. The feminist movements represented in the study are critical of mainstream lifelong learning pedagogy and offer an alternative way of transferring knowledge about women’s issues through museums or art galleries. This alternative approach aims to present the world differently and confront xenophobia and religious intolerance. However, it also presents other global social issues such as food insecurity and social inequality. The author argues that these institutions can be effective tools for feminist adult educators through informal and non-formal learning, as well as bring about significant positive changes at the individual cognitive level.

In her paper “Living and Learning with Dementia”, Jocey Quinn also discusses a significant issue. She argues that people with dementia are marginalised in terms of adult learning, despite...
the potential benefits of such learning for managing their condition and improving their lives. The willingness to learn is supported by a community of people with dementia. The research demonstrates that the mind and body are both active participants in the learning process, and thus should be understood as an embodied process. The author presents positive, forward-looking examples of people with dementia using adult learning as a tool to transform communities. The focus should not be on recalling the past, on nostalgia, but on living the present, as in childhood learning, and hopes for the future, which can bridge generations. The study demonstrates that individuals with dementia can learn through the beneficial effects of music, even at a very late stage. In addition to learning, the transfer of knowledge from individuals with dementia to future generations is also important.

The third part of the volume is entitled Social Learning and Activism for Change. In total, there are four chapters on the links between activism and social learning. The methodology employed in these studies is based on field research, with narrative interviews conducted. In two of the studies (Pilch Ortega and Gontarska et al.), this qualitative interview is complemented by other data. The papers explore the motivations that might motivate someone to take on an activist role, as well as the idea of rebuilding society and community, which became particularly topical in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Chapter 8, Rozalia Ligus “Regaining Lost Community Knowledge” examines the experiences of multigenerational Polish families who relocated from Polish Galicia to Bosnia after the Second World War and subsequently returned to Poland. Through an analysis of two interviews, Ligus’ study reveals how the experience of migration has shaped the lives of these families across generations, influencing their personal and collective identities through family narratives. The author of the study concludes that attitudes change generationally, and on this basis he distinguishes four generations. In the process, various forms of memory are activated, from the nostalgic experience of the oldest generation, through historical memories, to the experience of the youngest generation, for whom this experience of their origins is incorporated into their identity.

The ninth chapter employs a case study to illustrate the community-building power and action activity generated by a natural disaster situation. In “Social Learning and Building Solidarity” Angela Pilch Ortega presents the possibilities of social learning in a Mexican region (Istmo de Mexico Tehuantepec), using the example of Juchitán, the municipality worst hit by the earthquake. The author draws on an empirical study carried out in the town six months after the disaster. The already serious situation was further compounded by social inequality and vulnerability, as well as the indifference of criminal gangs and the government to the situation. Based on the interviews conducted, the research also illuminates how people frame and structure the situations they experience. The study demonstrates that through socio-cultural heritage, people are able to overcome vulnerability through social learning and the potential of community, and even create new forms of community and society through social reflexivity. The study is illustrated with the author’s own photographs, which enable the reader to gain an insight into the field.

In Chapter 10, the author Anna Bilon-Piórko, “The ‘Pulsating’ Activism of Polish Activists”, examines the history of Polish society over 70 years, based on narrative interviews with Polish activists. The focus of the study is on adult learning and the role of activists in their communities. In examining the motivations of two activists with disparate ages and life trajectories, the study considers not only their motivations but also the periods in their lives when they were
more and less active in social engagement. This provides insight into the ‘pulsating’ rhythm of social engagement and retreat into private life in the lives of individuals, with positive and negative experiences. According to the author, understanding and exploring these elements helps to understand individual motivations for social engagement.

In Chapter 11, the authors Marta Gontarska, Paweł Rudnicki & Piotr Zańko, “Learning (for) Civil Disobedience in Poland”, examine the significance of the individual and collective counter-hegemonic practices of the Extinction Rebellion (XR) movement in Poland. Representatives of the movement are raising awareness of the global climate crisis in the face of the passive attitude of policy makers. The authors demonstrate that civil disobedience can be learned and that a commitment to collective learning plays a significant role in the lives of the group’s activists. The authors’ research is based on narrative interviews with Xraktivists in Warsaw and Wroclaw and serves as a critical exploratory study. The study also highlights the pedagogical strengths of the XR movement, which could be the basis for the creation of a bottom-up democracy in the country.

The fourth and final part of the book is entitled Remaking Society and is also divided into four chapters. The authors emphasise the role of communities in the effectiveness of responses to global problems, a role that has been reinforced by the pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). In the chapter, the authors present positive examples of sustainable and creative andragogical practices that have been shown to be effective in rebuilding communities.

In Chapter 12, Marjorie Mayo provides a summary of the economic, political and social changes whose negative impacts have had a major impact on the most disadvantaged communities in her work, “Changes in Community Life”. The emergence of the pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus has exacerbated the situation. Mayo draws attention to the role of community-based learning and support networks, and supports the idea, also expressed by Freire, that people can use critical thinking to determine the needs of their communities, which will make their responses more effective. The author also uses examples of grassroots andragogy to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic to demonstrate the effectiveness of innovative initiatives to respond to the new situation.

In Chapter 13, Rob Evans examines the motivations of social intermediaries who work in vulnerable communities in his study “Learning to Make (and Remake) Society”. The study is based on narrative interviews with social mediators who participated in an Erasmus+ programme. The interviews, which were analysed in detail, reveal that the personal trajectories and experiences of social mediators, as well as their own learning in diversity, have shaped their personalities. According to Evans, social mediators play a significant role in rebuilding society through solidarity and inclusion.

In Chapter 14, Spanish researchers José Caride, Rita Gradaillé and Laura Varela Crespo examine the relationship between social pedagogy and initiatives created during the CoVID-19 pandemic. Their work is entitled “Social Pedagogy and Community Networks”. The study is based on Jacques Delors’ 1996 report to UNESCO, entitled “The Treasure Within,” which defined the four fundamental pillars of contemporary education: “learning to be,” “learning to do,” “learning to learn,” and “learning to live together.” The authors focus on the latter, and in their study, they describe the community forms and networks that have been strengthened in new ways during the epidemic.

In Chapter 15, Rob Evans, Ewa Kurantowicz and Emilio Lucio-Villegas provide a summary of the studies and reflect on the studies in their work on „Communities and Adult Learning in the
Making and Remade”. They present a framework for the book. The authors believe that the studies and examples presented can serve as good practice for solving or addressing the global problems of the present day. The authors posit a promising avenue for progress, wherein individuals, leveraging the strength of communities, solidarity, and useful knowledge, can collaborate with the state to transcend individual interests in pursuit of the common good.

The book illuminates aspects of adult learning that have not been accorded their due consideration in terms of social utility. The prevailing practice is to prioritize informal forms of training that are oriented towards economic gain, providing training that has economic utility but minimal social utility for communities. The authors employ precise terminology and strive to present concepts accurately, although a more comprehensive understanding of the work necessitates an awareness of political ideologies, ideas, and trends. The examples presented are based on practices that have been demonstrated to be an effective way to deal with problematic situations (e.g. in times of natural disasters or to deal effectively with racism) where traditional methods often fail. The authors therefore present initiatives that can serve as practical examples and models for effective community learning and also critically highlight areas for improvement. The text illuminates the concept of community learning from a perspective that is relatively understudied in the contemporary era. Despite the potential and efficacy of community learning in addressing societal challenges, it is often overlooked by governments and other centralized institutions.

The practical value of the book lies in the fact that the cases presented can serve as examples of good practice for those seeking solutions to local or global problems. At the same time, by moving beyond the formal school setting, it sheds light on community-based learning from an aspect that can offer successful ways of making learning more effective and practical.

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