

*Call for Papers*

**Zeitschrift für Weiterbildungsforschung ZfW**

*Journal for Research on Adult Education*

Issue 3/2020

**Adult Education and Populism**

Guest editors

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Populism is not a peripheral phenomenon. And it has never been one. At any times, in all regions of the world, Populism took place. Nowadays instead we are facing the stupendous fact, that populism is increasing and becoming more and more powerful in developed democracies. In Europe we can see the strength of populism currently in Italy, where two populist parties (one left, one right wing) won the elections in 2018 and were governing together for about 450 days, before this government clashed. Populist parties are getting stronger and stronger in countries like Hungary, France, Germany, Poland and Great Britain.

Populism is characterized by strategies of polarisation, personalisation, moralisation, combined with elements of propaganda and rhetoric. Arguments are “ad populum” (“to the folk”), “ad hominem” (“to the persons”), referring to common sense, against elite and against scientific approaches. A strong element in the populist approach is the black and white declaration, there exist only friends and enemies. Populism is open to different aims and ideologies. Several reasons can be listed for the raising effectivity of populism: above all, the people are less content with politics and politicians, they feel them far away from their interests and their needs, too distant and too technocratic. Secondly it is felt a development towards less equality, to exclusion, to alienation. Thirdly, and here migration is an important factor, there is the fear of losing stability, loosing “Heimat”, erosion of social capital. And there can be observed a change of democratic institutions, away from the peoples need, orientated towards global aims and structures (Osler, 2015; Foster, 2016).

It is obvious that developments like the raise of populism have to be in the focus of education, of adult education, of political adult education. Political adult education is mostly described and used as education for democratic citizenship in adult education, since the clear orientation to the political outcomes is perceived as ‘imposed’ to the participants and an opposite to the pluralism of views and perspectives which is preferred in adult education nowadays. Although adult education historically has a clear political character and was linked to some of the important social movements, democratic citizenship is seen as more appropriate framework for a modern, 21<sup>st</sup>-century individual. Global citizenship was recently added to the terminological and conceptual shifting, strongly supported by UNESCO. People are to be confronted with facts, data, empirical evidence. So far the political educator is a translator of reality, of facts (Perryman et al, 2017). After facts today being available for almost everybody, in internet and media, it is more about orientation than information. This need for orientation is more related to feelings, fears and insecurity, an open gate for populism, often combined with the mistrust in science and expert groups.

Whatever the differences within the field are, it did lose a lot of its importance. The cuts in adult education, done in many countries, have political or civic education of adults as one of the first victims; some international organisations support programmes fir civic education, but it is

dropping on the agenda of development assistance. Agenda 2030 and the sustainable development goals mention it only in one of the targets, even without any indicators or any effort that could enable or facilitate the implementation. At the same time, the campaigns and initiatives for the digital skills and training for the use of new ICT are mushrooming. The lack of digital are presented as the main problem of Europe and the world, and digitalisation is seen as a 'silver bullet' for many problems of education. Even more, the focus moved beyond on-line platforms and learning applications: the new '*deus ex machina*' in education is artificial intelligence, heavily promoted not only by interested companies, but also by UNESCO.

But this does hardly touch the problems of populism. The world these tendencies in education are relating and referring to is not the world most of the people live in, not Europe and especially not worldwide. Nationalism and racism are on the rise. 'Migrant crises' is only one of the indicators of these processes. Digitalisation did not help much: lacking orientation in the www-jungle and apparently value-free ICT led to the misuse of what was expected to be meant as a means for democratisation of the access to education. For large groups of people, it is a space where populism and nationalism are at home, every extreme or popular idea get easily supported, and the ways of online manipulation exceed massively capacities to prevent it. This sheds a new light on the problem of media-literacy and critical thinking. The recent political events in Europe show that this became more important than ever, since there are hardly any aspects of human life and work that are not influenced by political/ideological/religious manipulation, fake news etc. We are witnessing rather regressive transformations and a backlash in what was considered as a set of stable basic human values and widely accepted civilization achievements.

Political conditions call for deeper reflection of the role of adult education in the contemporary political and social framework. This refers to concepts of political education and education for democratic citizenship, to the assessment of their achievements and results until now, to the new understanding of media literacy with adult education, and – above all – to the possibility of strengthening critical and reflective thinking as the central effort of educationists facing the modern political challenges.

The list of topics that might be dealt with in this issue refers to:

- Postmodernism, diversity and pluralism of perspectives as the door-opener for ethical relativism and extremism;
- Post-truth phenomena, epistemological scepticism, pseudo-science and denialism – undermining knowledge, learning and reflectivity;
- Critical thinking, cognitive capacities and emotional approaches of the people;
- Strategies in adult education for combating fake news and qualifying professionals to deal with them;
- Research on education between freedom of speech, political correctness and new legislation.

Please send an abstract (max. 500 words) of your article until April 15, 2020 to any of the editors Paolo Federighi [paolo.federighi@unifi.it](mailto:paolo.federighi@unifi.it), Ekkehard Nuißl [nuißl@die-bonn.de](mailto:nuißl@die-bonn.de) and Katarina Popović [katarina.popovic@outlook.com](mailto:katarina.popovic@outlook.com) or to the editorial office [thomas.jung@die-bonn.de](mailto:thomas.jung@die-bonn.de).

Contributions may be either in English or in German.

**Deadline for manuscript: July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020**

**Publication date: December 2020**

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