

ESREA Active Democratic Citizenship and
Adult Learning Research Network
Institute for Pedagogy and Andragogy,
Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

MOVEMENTS FOR DEMOCRACY, CRITICAL LEARNING AND THE LIMITS OF WHAT WE KNOW

Book of Abstracts



Belgrade, 2023

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Learning Through Defense and Defiance – Environmental Protests in Serbia as a Sign of Hope and a Source of Inspiration

Accumulated environmental problems in the world of conflicts and contradictions naturally increase tensions and lead towards protests against decisions made by those in power, whether they come from governments, private entities, or groups motivated primarily by their own, mainly economic, interests. This is even more prevalent in societies facing constant threats to freedom of speech, pressures on democratic procedures and institutions, as evidenced in reports analyzing the actual (2021–2022) situation in Serbia (Ivkovic et al, 2022). With limited opportunities for citizens to actually participate in decision-making in their local communities, as well as to strengthen their capacities for that within educational programs (Orlovic Lovren et al, 2022), environmental protests in Serbia turned into a movement and a living learning lab in the last few years, supported by the civil society, experts, artists, and many others from both inside and outside the country. Besides its role in achieving their own goals, it also inspires other groups to stand for their rights in different rural and urban areas, gathered to prevent devastation, destruction or long-term consequences not only for the environment but also for local communities and their identities.

Starting from the premise that environmental adult education is a political and collective process grounded in the notion of environmental citizenship, which should be hopeful and leading towards action (Clover et al, 2010), this contribution aims to present learning experiences from environmental protests in Serbia from the perspective of their participants. Looking at the learning activities that were going on within the transactions between local people, experts, students, or supporters from various fields and places, it focuses on the following questions: What was the role of traditional and expert knowledge in providing motivation and support to their participation? What knowledge did they need and what lessons did they learn along the process? What were the sources and ways of their

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learning? Who were the teachers and who were the learners? Were there examples from other places they could learn from, and what is the experience they can offer to others fighting for their rights to live in a healthy and authentic environment?

The research is performed through interviews with selected participants representing activists organized in different places around specific goals (“defending the rivers,” “defending the forests,” fighting against the exploitation of lithium, etc.), of varied educational, social, and professional backgrounds. Findings will be presented through short video and presentation material.

This contribution should inspire a discussion on the power of examples in exploring hopeful solutions for environmental and democracy issues through adult education, as well as on the role of educators to support activities where “people learn how to defy others who might be laying out unwanted futures for them” (Newman, 2006, p. 11).

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