

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

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### Why Environmental Care and Social Progress?

The kick-off for this publication was a workshop titled ‘Environmental Care and Social Progress – Forgotten or Impossible Connection?’, organised at Tampere University as a pop-up seminar on 27 January 2020<sup>1</sup>. It was prompted by concerns about fragmentation or even competition between researchers and academics addressing environmental degradation, economic injustice, forced migration and refugees, and gender inequalities, particularly in relation to adult, vocational and higher education. A specific starting point was the release of reports by the International Panel on Social Progress (IPSP), established by research institutes, UN and ILO departments and supported by diverse foundations, addressing a wide range of challenges for social justice and progress.<sup>2</sup> This occurred concurrently with the work and recommendations of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the announcement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>3</sup> The seminar questioned the extent to which the policies and goals of the IPSP, the IPCC and the UN are inherently and mutually consistent, or whether they lead to fragmented national and supranational policies of ecological/green industries, economic growth, inclusion, social welfare and peace. It examined whether they have mobilised scholars in social sciences and humanities for planetary collaboration and how researchers in adult, vocational and higher education researchers have responded. It also delved into whether scholars can engage in voluntary cross-disciplinary collaboration beyond the competition for external funding and career advancement.

While the pop-up seminar served as an introduction, a second international workshop titled ‘Environmental Care and Social Progress:

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<sup>1</sup><https://equjust.wordpress.com/2020/01/17/environmental-care-and-social-progress-forgotten-or-impossible-connection-seminar-27-1/>

<sup>2</sup> International Panel on Social Progress (IPSP). (n.d.). <https://www.ipsp.org/>

<sup>3</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (n.d.). <https://www.ipcc.ch/>; United Nations. Sustainable development goals. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

Impacts of Beliefs, Values and Gender’ was organised on 27 November 2020<sup>4</sup>. This workshop was also part of the joint course ‘Foundations and Internationalisation of Adult Education’ between the universities of Tampere and Tallinn. Hosted by the EquJust Research Group and its collaborators,<sup>5</sup> such as the SVV Programme, Vocational Education and Culture Research Network, and partners of the Erasmus+ Global Mobility, the workshop aimed to further the previous discussion. It focused on refining the impact of religious, spiritual and ideological beliefs and values, as well as gender, on interpretations of environmental care and social progress, especially in the policies and practices of adult, vocational and higher education. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a workshop was conducted virtually, which emphasised the hegemony of technological progress and the promotion of European values in salvation agendas for both environmental and social crises.

The assumption of the organisers of the workshops was that addressing the challenges of the Anthropocene requires a cross-disciplinary examination of human-centredness from a planetary perspective. This crystallises in gendered beliefs and values on social progress across the planet, intertwining with technologisation, forms of governance and citizenship – understood as participation and democracy. There are diverse academic and civic movements, networks and associations that elaborate comprehensive alternative agendas for the future. These range from mainstream eco-modernism and global governance to ecofeminism and socialism, environmental justice, degrowth and anarchist movements.<sup>6</sup> One of the key controversies among these, which is also substantially educational, revolves around whether there could be a path (and enough time) through the transformation of current economic and political order,

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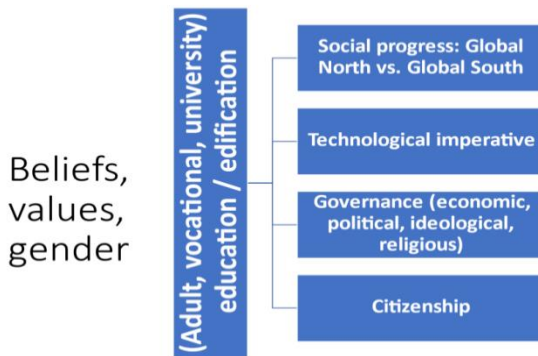
<sup>4</sup><https://equjust.wordpress.com/2021/02/12/environmental-care-and-social-progress-impact-of-beliefs-values-and-gender-workshop/>

<sup>5</sup> Equality and planetary justice in vocational, adult and higher education (EquJust)-research group. <https://equjust.wordpress.com/collaboration/>

<sup>6</sup>see Hicckel, J. (2021). What does degrowth mean? A few points of clarification. *Globalizations*, 18(7), 1105–1111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2020.1812222>; Kothari, A., Salleh, A., Escobar, A., Demaria, F., Acosta, A. (2019). *Pluriverse: A post development dictionary*. Tulikabooks; Martens, J. (2019). Revisiting the hardware of sustainable development. In *Reshaping governance for sustainability. Transforming institutions – shifting power – strengthening rights*. Spotlight on Sustainable Development 2019. <https://www.2030spotlight.org/en/book/1883/chapter/revisiting-hardware-sustainable-development>; Fishel, S., Burke, A., Mitchell, A., Dalby, S., & Levine, D. (2017). Defending Planet Politics. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 46(2), 209–219. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829817742669>

coordinated by the nation-states, or whether a radical shift in ways of life should start bottom-up, ‘here and now’. The dilemma lies in how to deconstruct the hegemonic, human-centred and gendered beliefs and values from the *perspective of nonhuman inhabitants* of the planet Earth.

Contributors to the workshops and this publication were invited to discuss policies, practices and theories that are either promoting or challenging the blind and uncritical adaptation to the hegemonic beliefs and values (see Figure 1). These beliefs and values maintain unsustainable ways of life in the world of adults.



**Figure 1:** Framework of the workshop conducted on 27 November 2020.

### Identifying Controversies

After the November workshop, contributors continued the discussion by questioning the compatibility of the universal values and beliefs of the Global North with the ontological constraints of the earthly environment and with the well-being and rights of all human and nonhuman inhabitants of the earth. We started to find it necessary to document our discussion about the (im)possibility of integrating local and planetary care for the environment into the dominant agendas of social progress in vocational, adult and higher education, and governance. Collaboration in preparing a joint publication proceeded slowly through virtual communication and two more workshops.

The scale and recent acceleration of human-introduced impact on the planet Earth – identified as the Anthropocene<sup>7</sup> – challenge conceptual and

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<sup>7</sup>McNeill, J.R., Engelke, P. (2014). *The Great Acceleration: An environmental history of the Anthropocene since 1945*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

theoretical frameworks in and the relations between all disciplines, particularly in the exclusively human-, society- and culture-centred social, human and educational sciences, and the political agendas they promote. It problematises their dependence on the concept of development – whether sustainable development or green industries – in education, governance, politics and technology, and their isolation from natural sciences. The concept of development largely overlaps with the concept of (social) progress and is closely associated with growth in economy, industry and well-being. While development, progress and growth are inherently human-, social- and Global North-centred concepts,<sup>8</sup> the chapters aim to illuminate the internal and reciprocal controversies between the Global North and the Global South. Irrefutable indicators and statistics demonstrate the unequal consequences of global warming between the Global North and Global South, the converse relationship between the so-called human development index and the use of earth resources between the Global North and Global South. They reveal the outsourcing of the ecological footprint of Europe (Global North) to the Global South and the polarisation in the distribution of economic wealth, commodities and well-being, along with violence and forced migration. Furthermore, they highlight global inequality in representation within supranational agencies, policies and governance.<sup>9</sup>

When inquiring about the (im)possibility of integrating environmental care and social progress, the workshop and this publication bring to the forefront the impact of beliefs, values and gender conveyed through educational institutions and activities. Education is an inherently normative, future-oriented activity, explicitly or implicitly intervening in the transformation – development or growth – of individuals, groups and societies. Even seemingly equal educational encounters that focus on cognitive, knowledge-centred aspects inevitably build on the beliefs and values of participants. In the context of this publication, the focus is on examining how the beliefs and values of educational institutions and

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<sup>8</sup> Kothari et al (2019).

<sup>9</sup> For ex. IPCC (2022). Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press. In Press. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/>; Global footprint network (n.d.). <https://www.footprintnetwork.org/>; Global peace index (2021). <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/GPI-2021-web-1.pdf>

activities relate to social progress, especially between the Global North and Global South, technologisation, governance (economic, political, ideological and religious), and citizenship and democracy.

Environmental degradation, economic and social inequalities and forced migration exhibit profound gender dimensions. On the one hand, there is irrefutable evidence of women's experience with poverty, violence, and social, economic and political exclusion. On the other hand, women play a significant role in movements advocating for environmental, ecological and social justice. When considering the impact of beliefs and values in educational institutions and activities, it is critical to reflect on their connection to gender.

Why does the publication focus on adult, vocational and higher education? Educational research and policy discussions on sustainable development overwhelmingly target the younger generation. The responsibility for safeguarding human life and the conditions for human life is placed on the shoulders of children and youth, even in moral and environmental education. However, it is adults, with their economic, political and social institutions, who possess the power to shape the future. It is adults, with their – gendered – beliefs and values in families, workplaces, and social, economic and political realms, who establish the rules for shaping the future. In mainstream educational discussions and practices, children and youth are typically perceived from a comprehensive perspective in their holistic contexts. However, disparate disciplinary frameworks and policy sectors appear to treat adults as fragmented entities, operating in segmented individual/private, social, economic and political spheres of life.

The workshops and publication process were intended to unfold through dialogues and debates. Presentations were expected to encompass different perspectives on suggested themes, or separate inputs to themes with varying viewpoints were encouraged. An introduction and discussion on the topics from the IPSP perspective aimed to stimulate dialogues. Because the workshops and the publication project were also pedagogical events, the ambition was to engage in discussions on themes and to complete the publication from a pedagogical perspective. The intentions and ambitions may not have been realised as expected, but we hope the contributions nevertheless promote dialogical and pedagogical discussion in the future.

## **Overview of Chapters**

Reflections on connections between environmental care and social progress and the impact of beliefs, values and gender begin with an

*introduction to the work of the International Panel on Social Progress (IPSP)*. Lorenz Lassnigg, who participated in the IPSP, discusses in his chapter ‘Social Progress and Environmental Care: Lessons Learnt from the IPSP’ the interpretations of social progress in the work of the IPSP and their contribution to environmental care and (vocational and adult) education.

In the chapter ‘Integration and Employability in Global North and Global South’, Nasrin Jinia, Golaleh Makrooni and Samya Saeed reflect on social progress from the *perspectives of the Global North and the Global South, focusing on connections between employability, forced migration and education*. The example from the Global North is an ESF-funded training project aimed at empowering migrants for employment. Despite wide agreement on ethnically sensitive and aware approaches among host societies, public authorities and NGOs, support measures lack the capacity to address diverse beliefs, values, attitudes and practices in gender relations, which are critical for mutual integration. Comparisons were made to approaches to the huge challenge of refugees and displaced people in the Kurdistan of Iraq (KRI). The grassroots-level initiatives rely widely on diverse NGOs that have a historical and cultural understanding of the problems. Their experiences would be worth learning in the Global North, but the liberation from dependency on funding and agenda-setting by the donors from the Global North would require direct contacts and collaboration between NGOs, universities, and adult and vocational education institutions in the Global North and Global South. In both contexts, it is vital to involve individuals with a migrant background who possess both research-based and experiential expertise to inform activities.

The next perspective on environmental care and social progress is the *technological imperative*, which was highly relevant to the implementation and topics of the workshop, given the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. In their chapter, ‘Technologisation as the Planetary Solution for Environmental Care and Social Progress? Critical Questions to Vocational and Adult Education’, Gabriele Molzberger, Anja Heikkinen and Shafiqul Alam question the emphasis on technological progress and the promotion of European values as solutions to both environmental care and social progress. The agendas for environmental care and social progress in the Global North rely on exploiting resources and outsourcing environmental and social problems to the Global South. In the case of Bangladesh, they problematise the transfer of solutions from the Global North to the Global South. Alternatives may be learnt from traditional, indigenous practices, where, for example, water and energy management

are adjusted to the local physical and social environment. The authors argue that the quasi-religious belief of the Global North in technological progress, building on the metabolic alienation of humans from nonhuman nature, has become globally hegemonic and is excluding solutions that draw on place-based and traditional experience and wisdom.

The perspective of the following three chapters is the *impact of beliefs, values and virtues* on environmental care and social progress in adult, vocational and higher education and in economic, political, ideological and religious governance. In their chapter, ‘Integrating Governance and Education for Environmental Care: Values and Virtues in Perspective’, Aka Firowz and Mohammed Asaduzzaman reflect on ways in which relations between governance and education could be understood on the basis of major traditions of Western and Eastern philosophy, focusing on their key values and virtues. They emphasise the importance of learning to practise harmony between diverse ways of life among humans and between humans and nature. Hannes Peltonen continues by problematising the contextual and social nature of beliefs and virtues. In his chapter, ‘On Belief, Virtue and Education in the Midst of Climate Change’, he shows that global governance requires revisiting traditional beliefs about what it means to ‘act well’ in front of the joint urgent planetary dilemmas. Eeva K. Kallio elaborates on the concept of wisdom as a fruitful starting point for discussing alternatives for a better future for humans and other entities. Her chapter, ‘Wisdom: Reflections and Problems of Current Theoretisation – Injustice of Value-Based Hierarchies’, argues that there is a need to analyse more questions regarding the puzzling psychological concept of ‘development’, as there is danger of implementing hidden values in words like wisdom as a developmental goal. There is also a need to deepen understanding of the meanings of wisdom in different religious, cultural and scientific contexts.

*Edification and citizenship* – more widely participation and democracy – was one of the perspectives on environmental care and social progress in all workshops. In his chapter, ‘Asymmetrical Power Relations in Digital Citizenship and Popular Adult Education’, Björn Wallén discusses the diverse potential and pitfalls of the concept of digital citizenship. Many of the popular adult education initiatives in the Global North, particularly Finland, to promote digital citizenship are problematic. They tend to rely on commercial digital platforms and thus become part of the global capitalist system and enhance competitive digital skills serving global markets, which is against the traditional values of equality and equity in popular adult education.

The workshops and publication project also had a pedagogical agenda. In the chapter ‘Confronting Environmental Care and Social Progress in Academic Journeys: Duoethnography’, Larissa Jögi and Anja Heikkinen provide a duoethnography with a pedagogical *perspective* on the topic. They reflect on their experiences of research-based teaching in academia, including programmes and courses on social change, critical studies and foundations of adult education, which engage teachers and students from the Global North and Global South. They invite authors and participants of the workshop to reflect on what they have learnt from each other and whether they have – and how – combined cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary and cross-generational approaches into the process.

In the concluding chapter, the authors offer a *collective synthesis* of the chapters, inviting readers to continue dialogues and debates. They provide recommendations for advancing in adult, vocational and higher education, governance, and research. The authors hope that the publication will support researchers, educators, practitioners and policymakers in addressing contemporary challenges related to the environment and sustainable development, both in the Global North and Global South. They share the planetary problems of environmental degradation, forced migration, and economic and social inequalities and emphasize the need for new contextualised forms of governance, particularly in the realms of adult, vocational and higher education, to address these challenges. This publication project attempts to develop dialogical and debating platforms to discuss problems and solutions through proper dialogue among diverse stakeholders.