

# **Compiled documentation from the eco-democracy symposium in June 2025**

## **Eco-democracy symposium June 2025**

### **Summary of Symposium Activities**

The research group Critical Perspectives on Educational Research (KUF) hosted an international symposium focused on eco-democracy and education. Over the course of three days, scholars from various disciplines convened to critically examine and discuss how the concept of eco-democracy could be interpreted and integrated into educational research and practice. The symposium featured a series of keynote lectures, which were broadcasted via Zoom. Each session consisted of a 20-minute presentation followed by a 10-minute segment dedicated to questions and reflective dialogue. The symposium also included a series of interactive workshops that allowed participants to engage more deeply with specific themes and methodological questions.

### **Daily Reflections and Thematic Explorations**

To provide a deeper insight into the symposium's intellectual trajectory, the following section offers a day-by-day account of the activities, discussions, and thematic developments that unfolded. Each day was structured around specific focal points, allowing participants to engage critically with various dimensions of eco-democracy in educational contexts. These reflections aim to capture the richness of the dialogues and the collaborative spirit that characterized the symposium.

#### ***Monday***

##### **11:30–12:00 Welcome and Speed-dating**

Brief presentations of participants' research interests and their points of entry into the symposium's core themes.

##### **12:00–13:00 Lunch at Campus**

##### **13:00–14:30 Keynote by Elin Saether, Asgeir Tryggvasson, and Michael Paulsen**

*Elin Sæther* (University of Oslo) introduced a critical perspective on citizenship education by questioning its conventional reliance on concepts such as community, national belonging, and the public/private divide. Drawing on assemblage theory and multispecies thinking, she proposed a more ecologically attuned vocabulary that acknowledges the interdependent nature of human and non-human life.

*Ásgeir Tryggvason* (Örebro University) explored the political dimensions of eco-democracy through the lens of agonistic theory. Drawing on Chantal Mouffe's concept of agonistic pluralism, he emphasized the role of conflict and collective identity formation in democratic life and invited reflection on how eco-democracy might accommodate political dissensus beyond anthropocentric frameworks.

*Michael Paulsen* (University of Southern Denmark) introduced the early stages of the Voices of Nature project, which explores how environmental and sustainability education might be reimagined as education in, with, and for nature. Drawing on post-humanist, Indigenous, and relational perspectives, he presented experimental methods for engaging students as co-researchers in place-responsive and multispecies learning environments, aiming to expand the concept of ecological citizenship within an eco-democratic framework.

#### **14:30–15:00 Coffee break**

#### **15:00–17:00 Workshop based on abstracts and themes/and questions**

During the workshop, participants engaged in an exploration of eco-democracy in relation to environmental and sustainability education. A central theme was the conceptual clarification of eco-democracy, not merely as a definition but as a dynamic and evolving idea shaped by educational practices, ethical considerations, and political tensions. Discussions highlighted the relational nature of voice—not only as representation but also as a form of engagement, raising questions about what is voiced and how it is voiced within educational contexts.

The relationship between eco-democratic education and environmental and sustainability education was examined, particularly in terms of governance, educational goals, and practical implementation.

Methodological concerns were also prominent, with participants seeking conceptual clarity and reflecting on the role of research and teaching practices in shaping eco-democratic education.

Overall, the workshop highlighted a shared interest in relational and responsive pedagogies, where response-ability – the capacity to respond ethically and attentively – was proposed as a potential guiding principle for future inquiry and practice.

### **18:30 Dinner in the City Centre**

*Tuesday*

#### **8.00-9.00 Workshop “In search for Eco-democracy”**

This day began with an outdoor activity in the surroundings inspired by *nature as a co-teacher*. During the workshop, participants were asked to explore and reflect on nature as citizenship and a more-than-human world as part of the democratic community. The four commitments (voice, consent, self-determination and kindness) were reflected on while considering the relationship and interactions with the more-than-human world.

#### **9.00-10.00 Keynote by Karen Malone and Heila Lotz-Sisitka**

*Karen Malone* (Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne) presented a mapping of the cartography of eco-democracy drawing on posthumanism, new materialist and Indigenous philosophical approaches. In doing so, she responded to significant ontological and epistemological questions about how or whether eco-democracy aligns with these theoretical approaches.

*Heila Lotz-Sisitka* (Rhodes University) reflected on the concept of confluence in relation to eco-democracy. Based on the idea of confluence as meaning the “coming or flowing together, meeting, or gathering at one point”, she presented three cases from southern Africa, where the confluence of transgressive learning and environmental justice concerns intersect, to draw attention to *process* in eco-democracy. In doing so she discussed the difficult, but not impossible, processes required to sustain efforts of transgressing unsustainable norms, and building eco-democracy understood as a confluence of human well-being and ecological love.

### **10.00-10.30 Coffee break**

### **10.30-12.00 Sámi Art and Gaaltije Museum**

The city of Östersund, where the symposium was held, is part of the traditional territory of the indigenous South Sami population (Sápmi), which spans Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Russia. Gaaltije is a Sami Centre and museum that combines art exhibitions with events and a shop featuring locally produced Sami products. The session included an encounter with Katarina Pirak Sikku's artwork *Vájjaldibme – Vandring*, located outdoors on the campus of Mid Sweden University. A representative from Gaaltije provided a guided interpretation of the installation, which evokes Sámi memory, mythology, and nature through sculptural and symbolic elements. The visit continued with a walk to Gaaltije, where a separate exhibition offered additional perspectives on Sámi culture and history. The museum shop was also open for those interested in browsing Sámi literature, crafts, and other items.

### **12.00-13.00 Lunch in the City Centre**

### **13.00-14.30 Workshop "Network - Why, what and how?"**

During this workshop, participants explored the purpose and practicalities of building a research network focused on eco-democracy in education. The session was divided into two parts, each involving small group discussions followed by collective sharing.

#### **Part 1: Exploring Needs and Directions**

Participants discussed:

- **Existing Networks:** What similar networks exist, and how do we differ? The participants identified a need for a network specifically addressing eco-democracy in education.
- **Identified group needs:** The group identified several core needs that a network could address: fostering mutual development, providing a platform for the conceptual exploration of eco-democracy, and facilitating ongoing reflection on the interrelationships between eco-democracy and education.

- **Focus Areas:** Ideas included influencing teacher education, making democracy and sustainability engaging, and connecting eco-democracy to educational practice.
- **Ways of Working:** Discussions covered being pioneers for eco-democracy, embracing change, acknowledging differences and tensions, working across disciplines, and experimenting with practical approaches.
- **Additional Reflections:** Aspirations, ethics, context, and the importance of relational diversity were also highlighted.

## **Part 2: Planning Next Steps**

The second part focused on concrete actions for the future, both short- and long-term:

- Writing collaborative pieces for academic journals
- Writing thinking pieces
- Organising future symposia and evening sessions
- Applying for network funding (e.g., COST, Nordforsk, Swedish Research Council)
- Developing shared research projects
- Meeting through digital platforms and reading circles
- Continuing to reflect on the need for eco-democracy in education
- Proposing a special journal issue based on shared questions and diverse perspectives
- Arranging experimental workshops and in-person meetings to develop working models and methods

### **14.30-15.00 Coffee break**

### **15.00-17.00 Workshop: Network Application and Funding**

As part of the symposium's practical orientation, participants discussed various strategies for securing research funding and strengthening academic networks within the field of eco-democratic education. Several alternatives were mentioned, including calls from the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet), with particular attention to how different funding formats might support interdisciplinary collaboration and long-term project development. The group also expressed an intention to

continue exploring additional funding opportunities and collaborative frameworks to support future initiatives.

### **18:30 Dinner in the City Centre**

#### *Wednesday*

The final day explored discussions in three parts – one about the concept of eco-democracy, one around a Special Issue, and finally, making future plans.

#### **8.00-10.00 Concept of eco-democracy**

This workshop departed from the questions:

- Why do we need such a concept as Eco-democracy in Educational Research and Practice?
- What aspects, questions and phenomena could be focused on?

The discussions brought up perspectives such as how education and the surrounding society are connected, the belonging of more-than-human species in society and politics, and the possibility of educational practices to answer questions of who “we” are as a core political issue. Possibilities for expanding the vocabularies of democracy education were discussed, and how education is both constituted and constituting in the world. It was discussed how the relation between eco-democratic education and environmental & sustainability education needs to be considered, and eco-democratic education was seen as “a provocation, opportunity, and a call to (re)think, redo and link democracy and ecology” in multiple ways.

Other perspectives that were raised included the critical aspect of the concept of eco-democracy. In relation to this, issues were raised, including the concept's potential to capture injustices and problematize educational practices and research, as well as its possibilities for creating change, developing methods, and challenging ideas about what it means to be human.

#### **10.00-10.30 Coffee break**

### **10.30-11.15 Themes for Special Issue (From the program: What did we get to?)**

Several ideas were proposed for potential themes of a Special Issue. Here they are compiled into three different aspects.

**1. The concept of eco.** Ideas were put forward regarding ecologizing democracy, complicating democracy, the more-than-human (in many democracies), and problematizing the abstract and universal.

**2. In relation to other concepts.** Other concepts that eco-democracy can be contrasted with are the Anthropocene, environmental & sustainability education, post-humanism, radical perspectives of democratising sustainability issues, governance, citizenship, justice, voice and power.

**3. Epistemology, ontology and methods.** Issues discussed were the relation between underlying onto-epistemological perspectives, who is seen as knowledgeable, possible tensions, as well as different methodological approaches (including micro practices).

### **11.15-12 Possible journals for and reflections around Special Issue**

Possible journals suggested were: EER, CJEE, AJEE, CriSTaL, Nordidactica (might be open for thinking pieces).

Further we reflected on how to proceed with a Special Issue. KUF at Mid Sweden University were suggested as editors and the call was discussed in relation to how open or focused it should be. Discussions around the format included ideas of thinking pieces as one possibility, either as a publication and/or as a basis for continuing to work with the network, as well as the possibility of articles in dialogue with each other or dialogue within each article. However, initially, the work might start with more traditional articles.

### **Where do we go from here?**

The days ended with discussions on how to proceed. Some aspects have already been implemented, such as preparing for the network meeting and activities aimed at increasing visibility, including creating a web page and contributing to a newsletter. Further ideas that can be continuously discussed in the group are planning for ECER (article drafts and/or symposium), network funding and how to proceed with writing (through thinking pieces or possibly new abstracts based on experiences from the symposium).

### **12.00-13.00 Lunch at Campus and Good-bye**

#### **Participants in the symposium:**

*Mina Boldermo Eriksen, University of Oslo, Norway*

*Teresa Elkin Postila, Mid Sweden University, Sweden*

*Christine Eriksson, Stockholm University, Sweden*

*Laura I Hultberg, University of Oslo, Norway*

*David Kronlid, Mid Sweden University, Sweden*

*Karin Larsson-Hult, Mid Sweden University, Sweden*

*Heila Lotz-Sisitka, Rhodes University, South Africa*

*Karen Malone, Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne, Australia*

*Linda Murstedt, Mid Sweden University, Sweden*

*Anneli Ott, University of Oslo, Norway*

*Michael Paulsen University of Southern Denmark, Denmark*

*Elin Sæther, University of Oslo, Norway*

*Ásgeir Tryggvason, Örebro University, Sweden*

*Linda Wilhelmsson, Mid Sweden University, Sweden*

