Nordic Popular Education Research Newsletter

During the NOBI Week, the Finnish Collaborative Research Programme for Liberal Adult Education and Popular Education (SVV) publishes the Nordic Research Newsletter in collaboration with partners. The newsletter showcases current research, doctoral dissertations, publications, research projects and policy initiatives from across the Nordic countries. Its purpose is to strengthen dialogue between researchers, research networks and practitioners, while promoting the use of research-based knowledge in the development of liberal adult education and popular education.

Newsletter highlights five interconnected themes in current Nordic research

1. Democracy, Citizenship and Spaces of Solidarity
2. Popular Education for Better Futures
3. Digital Participation, Inclusion and Ageing
4. Strengthening the Knowledge Base of Folk High Schools
5. Building Knowledge Across Borders

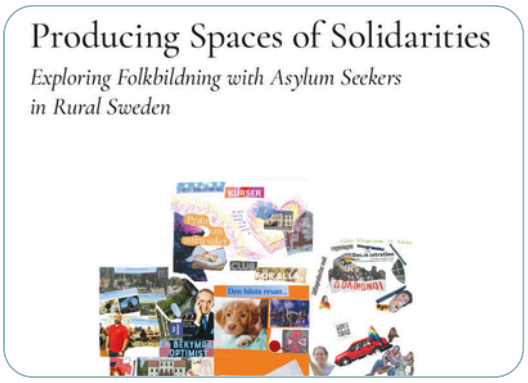
1. Democracy, Citizenship and Spaces of Solidarity

How democratic citizens are created?

Ove Korsgaard (2026). *How to Create a Democratic 'People' through Education? 'Dannelse' in the Danish Context.*

The word people lies at the heart of the concept of democracy. While democratic theory often focuses on how citizens rule, less attention has been given to how a democratic "people" comes into being. The text highlights the influential role of N.F.S. Grundtvig, who linked popular sovereignty with education and dannelse (formation/Bildung). It argues that folkbildning played a crucial role in transforming ordinary people into active democratic citizens and shows how differing understandings of Bildung and dannelse contributed to the distinct development of the concepts of folk in Denmark and Volk in Germany. The article offers valuable insights into the relationship between education, citizenship, and democratic culture.

Read more



Folkbildning as a Space for Solidarity

Zinaïda Sluijs (2026). *Producing Spaces of Solidarities: Exploring Folkbildning with Asylum Seekers in Rural Sweden.*

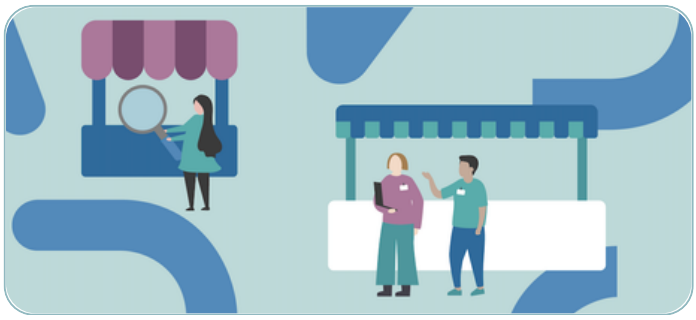
In her dissertation Zinaïda Sluijs (Uppsala University) examines how study circles and popular education initiatives create opportunities for belonging, solidarity and participation among asylum seekers in rural Sweden.

Read more

Contested Belonging in Civil Society

Emin Poljarevic (2026). *Civic Suspicion and Moral Sorting: Islamophobia, Folkbildning, and the Defunding of Muslim Civil Society in Sweden. Islamophobia Studies Journal 9(2), 175–199.*

Questions of inclusion and exclusion are also addressed in Emin Poljarevic's article, which analyses contemporary tensions surrounding popular education, civil society and Muslim organisations.



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2. Popular Education for Better Futures

2.1 Futures of Popular Education and Liberal Adult Education

What happens when policy priorities change?

Maria Elisabeth Nissen Jensen & Pia Seidler Cort (2026)**.** *The rise and decline of the Danish daghøjskole – how changing political priorities transformed an entire school form. International Journal of Lifelong Education.*

A recent article by Maria Elisabeth Nissen Jensen and Pia Seidler Cort examines the rise and decline of the Danish daghøjskole movement. The study shows how non-residential folk high schools once played a significant role in social inclusion and lifelong learning but have gradually been weakened by policy shifts emphasising employability, measurable outcomes and market-oriented governance. The article raises wider questions about the future of non-formal adult education and its capacity to support vulnerable groups in the Nordic lifelong learning systems.

Read more

In defence of popular education

Sverker Sörlin (2026). *Till folkbildningens försvar.*

In the article, Sverker Sörlin argues that popular education has been one of the strongest forces supporting social cohesion, democratic culture and trust in Sweden.

The book warns that weakening popular education may contribute to increasing polarisation, declining reading practices and reduced confidence in shared knowledge and democratic institutions.

Read more

Mapping the future of liberal adult education in Finland

Undervisning och kulturministeriet (2026). *Mellanrapport från framtidsarbetsgruppen för fritt bildningsarbete.*

A new interim report from the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture's Future Working Group for Liberal Adult Education reviews current developments, challenges and future opportunities for the sector. The report identifies key areas for development to ensure that liberal adult education can continue to respond to societal changes and contribute sustainably to Finnish society. The report will serve as background material for future policy discussions concerning the role of liberal adult education in Finnish society.

Read more

2.2 Sustainable Future and Hope

Civil Society as a Learning Environment

Petri Salo (2025). *Föreningslivets lärandeaktiviteter.*

Petri Salo's report (Åbo Akademi University) examines learning activities within Swedish-speaking study centres and civil society organisations in Finland and highlights their role as important arenas for popular education, participation and community-building. The report shows how organisations are rethinking their purposes, target groups and working methods in response to contemporary societal challenges. Among the key themes are the need to strengthen the educational identity of study centres, develop meaningful learning opportunities, reach new participants, and balance digital innovation with local community engagement. The report also suggests that organisations have much to gain from learning from one another as they navigate changing forms of participation and volunteering.

Read more

Award-Winning Doctoral Research in Environmental Education

Joanne Peers (2024). *Hydropoetic Relational Bodies of Environmental Education Research.*

Joanne Peers' doctoral dissertation (University of Oulu) was awarded the FERA Doctoral Dissertation Prize 2025 by the Finnish Educational Research Association (FERA). Drawing on posthumanist and hydrofeminist scholarship as well as her own South African background, Peers examines how the visible and invisible legacies of Apartheid continue to shape environmental education research. Through what she describes as "hydropoetic sensory entanglements", the study demonstrates how binary logics separate nature from culture, theory from method, school from home, adult from child, and time from place.

Read more

Folk High Schools as Builders of a Sustainable Future

New publications highlight the contribution of Nordic folk high schools to building hopeful, inclusive, and socially sustainable futures. Education Brings Hope focuses on the transformative potential of popular education and community learning. The forthcoming edited volume Conceptualisations of Social Sustainability explores key theoretical and research perspectives on social sustainability in the folk high school context.

Conceptualisations of Social Sustainability: Implications for Research on Nordic Folk High Schools (forthcoming, Spring 2027). *Johan Lövgren, Jonas Andreasen Lysgaard & Lasse Sonne (Eds.).*

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Education Brings Hope. A guide for a folk high school teacher (2026). *Ecological Folk High School Poland, Grundtvigsk forum & University of South-Eastern Norway.*

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3. Digital Participation, Inclusion and Ageing

Older people adapt, digital services do not

Two recent doctoral dissertations from the University of Jyväskylä challenge one-size-fits-all assumptions about digitalisation and ageing.

Laura Pajula (2026). *Does One Size Fit Most? Rethinking Access to Digital Public Services in Later Life.*

In her dissertation Laura Pajula explores how older adults engage with digital technologies and public services in everyday life. The study shows that digital participation in later life is diverse, selective and often combines digital and non-digital practices. Rather than expecting older people to adapt to digital systems, Pajula argues that public services and policymaking should better reflect the varied realities of ageing.

The findings highlight the importance of community-based learning opportunities and peer support, including activities organised by popular education providers such as summer universities, in helping older adults develop digital skills and confidence on their own terms.

Read more

Riitta Hänninen (2026). *Many Tales of Heterogeneity: Ageing in a Digitalising Society.*

Related themes are explored in Riitta Hänninen's dissertation, which highlights the diversity of older adults' experiences, practices and relationships with digital technologies.

Read more

4. Strengthening the Knowledge Base of Folk High Schools

Research School Strengthens Folk High School Research

The Swedish Research School for Folk High School Teachers is part of the government's initiative to strengthen the scientific foundation for teaching at the country's folk high schools. It is organized through a collaboration between Linköping University (host university), the University of Gothenburg, and Jönköping University. The research school aims at a licentiate degree and includes a total of 12 students.

Recent licentiate theses include:

Gustav Fridolin (2026)**.** *"Lite skäms jag ju…" Stress, klass och förhandlingar om respektabilitet bland deltagare i folkhögskolans allmänna kurser.*

Gustav Fridolin's study (Gothenburg University) explores how participants in general folk high school courses negotiate questions of class, stress and respectability.

Read more

Marie Louise Johansson (2026). *Att följa med en bit på vägen - Folkhögskolläraren och samtalen som kom på köpet.*

Marie Louise Johansson's thesis (Gothenburg University) investigates the significance of the unplanned conversations that emerge alongside teaching and how these contribute to learning, trust and educational relationships.

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Tova Björkquist (2026). *Där nästan allt är möjligt – Samtidskonstnärliga undervisningspraktiker på folkhögskolors konstkurser.*

Tova Björkquist's thesis (Gothenburg University) examines contemporary art education in folk high schools and its potential to foster creativity, critical reflection and bildning.

Read more

5. Building Knowledge Across Borders

Mapping popular education in four Nordic countries

Malene Thøgersen & Amalie Bøttern Steffensen (2025). *Study associations and folk high schools in four Nordic countries. Overview of definitions and statistics – a research tool*

The report provides comparative definitions and statistical overviews of popular education in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. The report is part of the network project ”Den nordiska folkbildningens betydelse för demokrati och kulturliv”, which seeks to establish a sustainable infrastructure for Nordic research collaboration in this field and to promote the development of comparative studies across the Nordic countries. While the tradition of popular education shares many similarities across the Nordic region, there are also significant differences in how the field is organised, which makes such an overview particularly relevant.

Read more

Global perspectives on the folk high school movement

Johan Lövgren, Asoke Bhattacharya, Melanie Lenehan, Dawn Jackman Murphy, Garry Nicholson & Sara Skovborg Mortensen (Eds.) (2025). *Perspectives on the Global Folk High School Movement and People's Future Lab.*

The anthology explores folk high explores folk high school traditions and learning communities inspired by Grundtvigian ideas across different parts of the world. The volume compares Nordic traditions with broader currents in civic education associated with thinkers such as Paulo Freire and Rabindranath Tagore.

The publication is linked to the Global Network for Folk High School Research, an international research network that promotes comparative studies and collaboration on folk high school traditions and their contemporary relevance.

Read more

Can a meal become a site of learning and bildning?

Daniel Östergren (2026). *Erfarenheternas gastronomi – en dialog mellan måltider, bildning och mänsklig förståelse.*

In his doctoral dissertation Daniel Östergren (Örebro University, 2026) investigates gastronomy as a space for human growth and learning. The study explores how shared meals, culinary knowledge and dialogue contribute to understanding, reflection and social development. The dissertation expands contemporary discussions on bildning by locating educational experiences in everyday social and cultural practices.

Read more

Further Reading and Acknowledgements

The editors would like to thank **Henrik Nordvall and Mimer, Malene Thøgersen** and **Johan Lövgren** for their valuable contributions to this newsletter.

Mimerbladet (in Swedish)

This newsletter was assembled and edited by **Jenni Pätäri,** the SVV-program's coordinator and designed and formatted by **Elisa Rasinkangas**, The Finnish Adult Education Association's communications coordinator**.**