

## **ICAE General Assembly Bali 27 Nov-1 Dec. 2023 Some Personal Reflections**

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The General Assembly of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), in its 50th year of existence, celebrated in this special issue, took place in Bali, Indonesia, 27th November to 1 December, 2023. It was held in the lavish surroundings of the Holiday Inn complex, Barunia, specifically in the Cinnamon Ballroom and other well equipped rooms for the various workshops.

Adult educators and their organisations, national and regional, hailed from different corners of the globe. For some, such as me, travelling as UNESCO Chair in Global Adult Education, it meant a long trek from Malta to Dubai with a nine hour wait at Dubai International Airport and an eight hour journey onward to Bali. Luckily, the organisers provided hospitality and the hotel provided a welcome shuttle. The weather was not clement and most of my time away from assembly commitments were spent indoors, as thunder and lightning at times rent the skies. There was a tinge of sadness as this assembly occurred against the background of a terrible human carnage in Palestine and specifically Gaza, while the war in Ukraine shows no signs of abating. This was a rather strange time to celebrate 50 years of endeavours for human education when human life is treated cheaply and rendered ever so disposable. To avoid this issue is to render such calamities the elephant in the room. Innocent lives, including those of adults and children, are terminated abruptly. What we witnessed is a callous murderous sortie targeting civilians and youth. What we have since been witnessing are ongoing mass scale reprisals taking the form of destruction and alleged genocide.

The Assembly also occurred against the background of stalwarts in the field having departed this world in recent years. They were remembered during the final dinner. Many were also remembered in the various 'In Memoriam' pieces

in this journal since its revival in 2022, three of them in this special issue. Many names of departed adult educators were called out, at the final dinner, as part of the Assembly's reminiscences of the ICAE's 50 years of existence. To these we just now add ( at the time of writing) that of West Bengali adult educator, Srabani Maitra from the University of Glasgow. A tribute to her will be included in the first issue of the next volume of *Convergence*.

On 29th November, a former ICAE Associate Secretary General ( 1976-1985) and Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) Secretary General ( 1972-1985), Chris Duke, a mainstay in the international adult education field, was duly remembered, at the Assembly. There was a touching tribute by Maria Lourdes Almazan Khan. Chris Duke's article in the last issue of *Convergence* is probably his last published piece, unless others will appear posthumously.

On a happier note, this was a festival of adult educators and adult education provision on a global scale. We witnessed a galaxy of adult education associations, national and regional, foremost among the latter ASPBAE and PEKKA. PEKKA stands for, in loose English translation, Women Heads of Family Empowerment Foundation. We were given a taste of Indonesian culture through traditional dancing during the social events and were guarded against the hazard of stomach upsets by the provision, in our hotel room, of sealed bottles of water. I confess to having once lowered my guard and lapsing into my routine sipping of tap water, perhaps distracted by the loss of a colleague and friend whose funeral service I had just followed through streaming on my computer. My body did not take long to rebel, though the inevitable visceral diarrhoea did not last long and I promptly recovered. We were also given a taste of the humdrum of life in and around Bali on our group visit to our chosen adult education project, which offered me an opportunity to appreciate the greenery around the locality and its excessive cacophony of motorcycles, very much the staple of life on the roads. Never have I seen so many motor bikes as I did in Bali.

On an alarming note, I gathered from my group's study visit, that the struggle against AIDS still features prominently on the Adult Education agenda in Bali. We also had concurrent workshops in the main conference site covering such themes as Citizenship, Partnerships, Gender and Skills, Media Literacy, Adult Literacy, Racism and other Discrimination, Climate Change, Civil Society, Learning Cities and Curriculum GlobALE, to name a selection. Key ideas were gleaned and carried forward by the moderator from each workshop.

There were very forward looking and inspiring talks, not least the opening address by the ICAE President, Robbie Guevara with his penchant for specific gestures he encouraged us to repeat when the situation warranted it. This time it was different numbers of claps in response to different stimulating Adult Education ideas. He was also great in enculturating us into aspects of local ritual. Katarina Popovic was her usual business-like self as she impressed upon us the serious effort involved in spreading the adult education gospel far and wide. She is after all a shining product of that venerable school of Andragogy that is the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Belgrade, testament to the legacy and inspiration of the redoubtable Dusan Savicevic. This is one person who made his mark in the international adult education firmament and who has his place in the pantheon of distinguished international adult educators. The ICAE 50 years have also been enriched by stalwarts such as him, Budd L. Hall, Dame Nita Barrow, Julius K. Nyerere, Paulo Freire, Lalage Bown, Alan Tuckett, Peter Jarvis, Shermaine Barrett and the rest of the galaxy that made this event - a veritable Adult education jamboree - a truly memorable one.

The ICAE's half century of existence will continue to be celebrated, on a much smaller scale, at the Second Malta International Global Adult Education Seminar this April. The invitees this time will be a small coterie of people connected with the International Council. As with the first seminar, the articles emerging from their presentations will hopefully appear in a forthcoming issue of *Convergence. An International Adult Education Journal*, the outlet given its due prominence at this General Assembly in Bali.

**NB.** Ideas expressed in this reflective report represent the personal views of the author and should not in any way be attributed to the International Council for Adult Education.