

## POPULARISED SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS REPORT

### **OFF THE BEATEN TRACK: EXPLORING THE ORCA PASS INITIATIVE AS A COLLECTIVE EXPERIMENT FOR DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION THROUGH A COMPLEXITY LENS**

Grounded in a general concern about the present socio-ecological predicament, the dissertation aims at contributing to the way democratic education is thought about in the context of collective experiments. The author was particularly interested in gaining insights regarding conditions favouring significant shifts in ways of thinking about and responding to intricate and uncertain sustainability issues. Drawing on an unconventional conception of democratic education, notably informed by complexity thinking, she constructed a framework, linking the three notions of interruption, pedagogic subjectivation and bifurcation, through which she would explore a concrete case.

Launched in the late 1990's by a coalition of non-governmental environmental grass roots organisations, based in respectively the State of Washington and the Province of British Columbia, this case, called the Orca Pass Initiative (OPI), stood out as a promising experiment for democratic education as revisited. Its purpose was to promote establishment of a marine protected area spanning the Canada/US border so as to halt alarming decline of marine species (among which a resident population of orcas) and degradation of marine and coastal ecosystems in the inland sea now officially called the Salish Sea. Since the OPI offered an opportunity for indigenous and western science-based perspectives to rub shoulders, the author hoped to highlight new options for action resulting from interaction between distinctively different ways of thinking about and practicing governance of marine commons.

The inquiry led to the tentative conclusion that, while the OPI did not, even in its heyday, bring about what could legitimately be considered *radically* novel ways of thinking about this matter of public concern, analysis pointed to qualitatively significant shifts over time in the vision informing the initiative as far as ethics and shared governance across the border were concerned. It also suggested that representatives of Coast Salish Nations emitted messages with significant interruptive and differentiating potential regarding these themes at meetings of relevance to the OPI. Against this backdrop, the author felt able to claim that the initiative made a noteworthy move towards embodying a space for 'new style' democratic education in which voices,

grounded in a worldview differing distinctively from that informing western science, had an opportunity of making an imprint.

The inquiry also brought insights of broader relevance for educational theorising. It highlighted the potential of informal, collective experiments for acting as ‘hatcheries’ for fresh thinking about our relations to each other and to the more-than-human world and for reframing dissent and the perennial tension, at the core of all societies, between difference and construction of a common cosmos. Other insights pertained to how largely self-driven initiatives, in which representatives of usually less-listened-to segments of the population get a chance of becoming teachers, may challenge arbitrary limits in mainstream thinking and hence usefully complement conventional pedagogical interventions. They also pointed to how relinquishing a clear-cut distinction between process and outcome in educational contexts may offer an escape from the confinement of pre-defined results. From a more practical point of view, the inquiry brought a series of recommendation for practitioners facing the challenging issue of sustainable governance of sea basins shared by two or more countries. Finally it raised a set of questions for future research.