



Call for Papers

**UNESCO's Role in Post-War Educational Transformation and Decolonization
On the 80th Anniversary of UNESCO's Founding**

Roma Tre University

University of Coimbra, Center for the History of Society and Culture

University of Geneva

UNESCO played a pivotal role in shaping post-war educational transformations, contributing to the reconstruction of war-ravaged school systems and fostering new visions of education and learning. Notably, the organization assumed a critical role in the decolonization process, supporting the establishment of independent national education systems and promoting access to education for all peoples.

In recognition of the 80th anniversary of UNESCO's founding, the Roma Tre University is pleased to announce a call for papers for an international webinar series, scheduled to unfold across three distinct dates in the Spring of 2025: March 26, April 16, and May 14. The working languages of the webinar series will be English, French, and Italian, and contributions will be published in open access with Roma Tre University Press. This series is designed to provide a platform for presenters to showcase their ongoing research projects, discuss their chosen methodologies, highlight the types of sources being utilized, and share anticipated outcomes. The focus is on presenting works in progress and fostering collaborative and transdisciplinary discussions on emerging research.

In addition to the webinar series, a final conference will be held on November 18, 2025, at Roma Tre University. This conference will provide a platform for broader discussion and reflection on the research project's findings. Proceedings from the conference will be published with an international publisher, to be determined. This initiative invites scholars, researchers, and practitioners to submit papers that explore UNESCO's key role in post-war educational transformations, with a particular, though not exclusive, focus on the issue of decolonization.

Key Themes:

- UNESCO and post-war education reconstruction
- UNESCO's role in promoting new pedagogies and learning approaches
- UNESCO and late colonialism: the relationship between UNESCO and colonial powers

- UNESCO and decolonization: the establishment of independent national education systems and access to education for all; interculturality, non-state actors, and the transformation of education in post-colonial societies
- UNESCO and the Cold War: the organization as a forum for transnational exchanges that crossed the Iron Curtain and/or as an arena for confrontation between competing visions of education during the Cold War
- The new forms of technical cooperation introduced in various regions, including “non-self-governing territories”, and their impact on educational development.
- The long-term impact of UNESCO initiatives on global education, including technical assistance programs and network activities, warrants further investigation. In this perspective, we invite explorations of the UNESCO Chairs program, established in 1992 to foster international inter-university cooperation and knowledge sharing, and its role in shaping educational landscapes worldwide.
- Challenges and prospects for education in the 21st century

This call for papers particularly invites submissions delving into the concept of “fundamental education” as outlined in UNESCO’s foundational documents. UNESCO’s early vision emphasized education’s role in fostering social and economic development, ultimately contributing to global peace. “Fundamental education”, as envisioned by UNESCO, encompassed not only basic literacy and numeracy skills but also broader areas like health, hygiene, agriculture, and resource management.

We encourage submissions that explore the following aspects:

- Theoretical underpinnings: Analyze the philosophical and ideological foundations of UNESCO’s 1947 concept of “fundamental education” and subsequent educational concepts and models. How did they relate to prevailing educational models in colonial and non-colonial contexts? What role did pedagogues and experts from the Global South play in its elaboration?
- Case studies: Investigate specific instances where UNESCO’s educational concepts and models, including “fundamental education”, were implemented, particularly in the early years following its formulation. How were these programs adapted and received in different contexts?

We particularly encourage submissions that investigate specific historical case studies from the post-war world where UNESCO’s evolving educational concepts, programs and models were implemented to address issues of economic and social differentiation, hierarchization and marginalization. These studies should analyze how the programs were adapted to address the needs of these communities, and how these influenced UNESCO’s agenda, with a specific focus on promoting social and economic development and gender and ethnic equality in educational access and outcomes.

Here are some potential areas of enquiry:

- Programs targeting specific marginalized groups: How did UNESCO’s educational concepts, programs and models, such as “fundamental educational”, addressed the needs of groups facing economic hardship, social exclusion, ethnic differentiation, or geographical isolation, in colonial and non-colonial societies?
- Gender (in)equality: How did UNESCO’s educational concepts, programs and models dealt with gender imbalances in education? Did they actively promote equitable access to education for girls and women? What challenges and successes were encountered in this endeavor?
- Local adaptations: How were UNESCO’s principles adapted to the specific cultural and social contexts of different communities, under distinct forms of rule?
- Cultural “integration”: Did the meeting of different cultures create integration or did one prevail over the other?
- Institutional realities and dynamics: How did UNESCO’s educational concepts, programs and models engaged with, and were shaped by, other institutions, from states to other international organizations, governmental and non-governmental?

This seminar series also aims to delve into the transformative role that civil society organizations, religious groups, local communities, and families have played in children and adult’s education, aligning with UNESCO’s vision for educational transformation. We are particularly interested in exploring how these actors, especially in the post-colonial world, have shaped more diverse educational approaches, preserved local knowledge, and championed equitable access to quality education. We especially welcome research that investigates the following themes, which bridge the gap between the political and social history of late colonialism and decolonization and the history of education:

- Innovative solutions for equitable education and persistent inequalities in post-colonial education: How have non-state actors and their intercultural education strategies contributed to a richer and more inclusive educational landscape in post-colonial societies? Conversely, what factors have perpetuated educational inequalities in these same societies, considering factors like ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, and disability? We particularly value research that investigates the root causes of these disparities and/or reconstructs how innovative pedagogical approaches and initiatives have been developed to combat educational inequalities and expand access to quality.
- Education and social control: tools of assimilation in the colonial era: How did vocational training programs, sport education practices, and missionary school strategies function as tools for social control and cultural integration or assimilation? We encourage analyses of these specific areas that can shed light on the complex relationship between education and power dynamics during the colonial era.
- Education and cultural encounters: How educational Western-styled models impacted local communities and transformed their worldviews and social habits, while be shaped by them as well? What was the agency of local actors and institutions in shaping top-down models and programs? We incite studies that engage with these multifaceted dynamics.

- Education and emancipation: How did local peoples use education, and its opportunities, as mechanisms of social mobility, economic advancement, and political organization, contesting colonial power and other political and social inequalities, before and after formal independence? We welcome investigations that explore the multiplicity of contexts, uses, and effects, of educational programs, including students' mobility schemes in the postcolonial era.

Multi-actor perspectives: In addition to the above, we encourage submissions that shed light on the complex relationships between UNESCO and various actors involved in the implementation of fundamental education programs. This may include:

- National governments: How did national governments collaborate with UNESCO in designing and implementing fundamental education programs? What were the challenges and successes of this collaboration?
- Religious institutions: How did religious institutions engage with UNESCO's fundamental education initiatives? Did they offer support, resistance, or a combination of both?
- Supranational institutions: We are particularly keen on receiving research that explores the role of emerging supranational institutions, such as the early European Community institutions or non-governmental organizations, in shaping and supporting UNESCO's fundamental education programs, including inter-imperial organizations.
- Political and trade union associations: We welcome submissions that examine how political and trade union movements in emerging nations, particularly during decolonization events, interacted with UNESCO's fundamental education agenda.
- Civil society actors: We are particularly interested in contributions that reflect on the role of civil society actors, such as cultural organizations, pedagogical associations, and intellectuals, in the promotion and implementation of fundamental education programs.

Organizers:

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Submission Guidelines and Important Dates

- Abstract Submission: Please submit your abstract (max 300 words) along with a brief bio (max 150 words) to: unesco80.anniversary@gmail.com by November 30, 2024.
- Notification of Acceptance: January 31, 2025

Please note:

- Submissions will be considered for both the international webinar series and the culminating conference.
- Abstracts outlining research in progress or preliminary findings will be prioritized for the webinar series, fostering synergistic discussions on methodology, sources, and future research directions.
- The definitive dates for the webinars and the conference, as well as logistical details, will be communicated upon acceptance of proposals.