

A Report from the Inaugural European Society for Research in Adult Development (ESRAD) symposium on July 24-25, 2011 in Lund, Sweden

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On July 24-25, 2011, the European Society for Research in Adult Development, ESRAD, held its inaugural meeting and symposium in Lund in the south of Sweden. We were 22 participants from 10 countries: Sweden, Finland, USA, Norway, Germany, Great Britain, Portugal, Belgium, Iran (!) and Bulgaria, who met for two days of presentations, discussions, workshop, meetings, and getting to know each other. This “report from the field” is our public demarcation of the inaugural event.



20 of the symposium participants outside of Classicum. Photo: Gerth Hyrkäs

ESRAD is connected to the Society for Research in Adult Development, SRAD, which held its first meeting in 1981 at Harvard University where Michael Lampert Commons was the main organizer. Thirty years later, Michael was one of the initiators and organizers of this first non-American event along with Eeva Kallio from University of Jyväskylä, Finland, who had been promoting a European meeting for a long time, and Sofia Kjellström from Jönköping University and me from Lund University, both in Sweden.

The symposium venue, the beautiful Classicum building, is the home of the Pufendorf Institute, a cross-disciplinary research institute inaugurated at Lund University in 2009 to encourage cross discipline interactions involving all faculties. Therefore, it served to be a most appropriate location for the symposium. Pufendorf Institute was also kind enough to sponsor the symposium by lending us the house for these two days for no charge.

The first day's program had a broader aim towards various aspects of adult development, such as political development, development of care, abuse of older people and postformal thinking. In the afternoon the inaugurating ESRAD took place and officers were elected, with Eeva Kallio as president and website manager, Sofia Kjellström as vice president, Kristian Stålne as secretary, and Michael Commons as membership coordinator. We also elected a committee to further investigate the details of how to register and where to base the organization.

The second day focused more on the Model of Hierarchical Complexity (MHC), with its theory and applications. Before lunch Michael, the founder, or gardener as he puts it, gave a workshop on MHC and presented various theoretical aspects of the model as well as the relations to models of adult development. The sessions after lunch aimed at applications of MHC and scoring according to its related Hierarchical Complexity Scoring System (HCSS).

The closing and sum up session made it clear that although we had two full days to present papers, get to know each other, organize and plan further activities, we would have had no trouble in filling up another two days. With the quality and amount of research that is being carried out here in Europe, it really feels that we have reached and exceeded a critical mass, which was confirmed by the creative and engaging interactions at the symposium.

The full symposium program along with abstracts and pictures is viewable at the new ESRAD website, <http://www.europeadultdevelopment.org/>, are available. We thank all participants who came to Lund for the many ways they made this a great first symposium! The future of European adult development research certainly looks bright and we surely look forward to further meetings and interactions!

The last word I give to José Alves, who in his speech quoted Leonard Cohen: "There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in." May ESRAD symposia continue to be a source of adult development light.