



Fourth International Conference of Scuola Democratica “Learning for democracy/Democracy for learning”

SESSION M16

Digital Transformation and Democratic Regeneration: the Essential Role of Critical Education in the Age of Algorithmic Capitalism.

Edited by AUREA Studium

Roma, Università La Sapienza, 4 settembre 2026

Conclusions

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The six papers presented in this session address a crucial issue: digitalization cannot be considered a neutral space, but rather appears to be a socio-technical and political ecosystem dominated by platform capitalism and algorithmic governmentality.

The common thread uniting these works is the urgency to rethink education and training not as subaltern adaptation to technologies, but as a democratic safeguard to restore human agency, ranging from formal educational contexts to professional and workplace environments.

The papers we have heard can be grouped into three broad areas of reflection:

1. **Deconstruction of the Infrastructure and User Experience:** The presentations by Matarazzo and Dolente, as well as that by Gardoni, showed us how digital opacity operates long before the content itself, shaping behaviors through persuasive design, gamification, and data extraction logics. Literacy cannot be limited to source verification; rather, it must decode the "metadevice" of the platform and promote pedagogies of care and slowness (slow media).
2. **Biographies, Childhood, and Artificial Intelligence: Protecting Agency:** Barricelli's contribution and the work by De Feo and Bellotti shift the focus onto the subjects, utilizing biographical sociology and early childhood education, respectively. Both highlight the risk of eroding human agency in favor of algorithmic agency (amid biases, hallucinations, and the reproduction of inequalities). The pedagogical response relies on storytelling, sociological imagination, and the defense of "micro-spaces of autonomous attention" from the earliest years of life.
3. **Vocational and Adult Education Facing the Transition:** Finally, Guerrini with the DIGICARE project and Ferrante with the INAIL experiment bring us onto the terrain of field training aimed at social workers and non-technical professionals. By employing everyday analogies, narratives, and experiential approaches, it emerges how cognitive and emotional barriers can be broken down, turning AI literacy into a concrete condition of citizenship and social justice.

These contributions leave us with a shared awareness: critical education in the age of algorithms is not a specialized niche, but a new frontier for democracy.