

# The Longing for Utopia: Trends in Life-Long Adult Education in a Highly Developed, Technological Society

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## Problems of Highly Developed Countries

In our world system there exists an international division of labour between the so-called underdeveloped countries of the third world and the so-called highly developed countries, which might properly be termed: 'over-developed'. Contrary to much popular belief, serious social defects are to be found in the over-developed countries. Among these defects are: alienation, individual isolation, dissolution of family life, stress, value crises, instrumentalism, emotional unhappiness, resignation and hopelessness as to the future.

The social defects of the overdeveloped countries show themselves very clearly in the workings of the education systems of those countries. The serious daily problems in educational life in these countries (e.g. discipline problems; motivational crises) can only be comprehended by the realization that they are symptoms of over-development within a global system. Thus the task of the researcher in the sociology of education is to uncover the real relations between the educational micro-situations with their subjective experiences and the world structure, i.e. to further the development of what C. Wright Mills (1959) calls "sociological imagination".

What, then, is the typical social atmosphere and the typical subjective experience of the Adult Classroom in a technically highly developed Western society? What kind of daily educational life can be observed in an adult classroom in such a country? Roughly speaking, the following phenomena can be witnessed: (1) frequent signs of boredom and indifference together with lack of attention and high drop-out rates (2) problems in communicating in the value sphere i.e. lack of ability to carry out ethical and political communication. These two phenomena could be termed (1) motivational crises and (2) value crises.

The following report from the study "Adult Education in Denmark" presents a theoretical apparatus of understanding and explaining the above mentioned phenomena, supported by some initial empirical evidence.

## A Theoretical Approach: Three Theses on Adult Education in the 1980s

The three theses which will be expounded in the following are not meant as specific hypotheses to be confirmed or immediately disconfirmed. They are general assumptions of a heuristic character, or 'high-level-hypotheses' (Galtung, 1967, p. 454 ff), which are later to be developed into hypotheses of a more specific character. The main point at this phase of work has been an attempt to develop and formulate a theory, to be judged by its eventual fruitfulness or sterility, by its ability or the lack of it to grasp the most important phenomena of the times.

### Thesis 1: Individual Motivation

Thesis 1 involves motivation of adults, and, as with Berlyne, starts off by placing two kinds of motivation in relation to each other. Thesis 1 reads as follows: *In adult education in our time, there is a relationship of contradiction between the external (instrumental) motivation and the internal (subject-committed), and the external will normally be very dominant in relation to the internal.*

This pair of concepts - internal and external motivation - has been forwarded in literature in recent times under a series of designations; there has been talk of internal and external, intrinsic and extrinsic, subject-committed and instrumental, or direct and indirect motivation. In relation to human beings the main point may be set forth as follows: It appears to be the case that people occupy themselves at times with a subject or phenomenon, because the subject or phenomenon, in and of itself, is attractive or intriguing. At other times, they occupy themselves with a subject or phenomenon because, by so doing, they will achieve something else which they are seeking. In the first case, the involvement with the subject has worth in its own right, while in the second, such involvement is the means or the instrument needed to achieve a benefit which is external to the actual situation. One might add that the activity in these two cases is accompanied by an internal and an external pleasure, respectively.

The thesis thus deals with such phenomena as genuine thirst for knowledge, curiosity, the all-consuming interest in a subject and the internal satisfaction obtained by occupation with it, absorption in the subject matter itself, in-depth problem study. It claims that the appearance of these features is very threatened by the growing preference for an instrumental use of educational opportunities, employed in order to move away from something unpleasant and towards something thought to be better.

The theoretical distinction made, in recent years, between internal (intrinsic) and external (extrinsic) motivation has been based particularly on the works of Berlyne. Berlyne (1960, 1963) has apparently been able to show that man has an inherent predisposition to wonder. The vital question now is what our society does with this predisposition. In what parts or recesses of society is it stimulated? Where is the development of this predisposition nourished, and in relation to which aspects of the outside world? And in which parts and recesses of society is it held in check or suppressed?

In order to answer such questions, it is necessary to regard motivation as something which has a social existence. Different societies and different aspects of a given society are characterized by the forms of motivation which are typical for each. Thesis 1 suggests that our society today is characterized by the fact that internal motivation - the genuine thirst for knowledge and a genuine wonder - is about to be relegated to the nooks and crannies of society.

## Thesis 2: The Life Style of the Classroom

**T**he second thesis involves what here is called 'life style', which is acted out at an interactional niveau. The thesis reads as follows: *In adult education in our time, there is a relationship of contradiction between a technical-instrumental life-style, and the technical-instrumental will normally be very dominant in relation to the value-oriented.*

The content of this thesis has been taken from Habermas (1968), where the ideas particularly relevant to the thesis are expressed in his well-known essay, *Technik und Wissenschaft als 'Ideologi'*. Habermas' essay characterized as it is by his Hegelian-inspired thinking, is difficult in terms of formulating a clear and unambiguous interpretation. It can be said that, throughout his essay, he develops a contradiction between the technical or 'objective' on the one hand, and the ethical and political on the other.

Habermas operates with the relationship between two concepts taken from Hegel - that is, the concepts of work and interaction. These concepts are basically different in their nature or, if you will, in their logic.

By 'work' Habermas means all forms of action, whose rationale lies in their goal; that is to say, those actions which aim at realizing or meeting prearranged goals. The work adheres to what can be called a goal-means logic. As an example of typical work process, as Habermas conceives it, the production of an automobile can be given. This is a detailed, planned and controlled process in which the metal, from the time it is brought into the factory, is transformed during countless technical actions and processes, in which both men and machines realize goals set up by others until the moment when the automobile emerges complete.

The opposing concept, 'interaction', is somewhat more difficult to pin down. It stands for all those forms of human togetherness which are regulated by values and norms. It accounts for everything which occurs between people in the entire socio-cultural sphere of life. Examples which illustrate this concept might include people who meet - or used to meet - in church in a religious community, the family festivities and togetherness of earlier times, people who meet in a political or national community, and real relationships of love and friendship. The interaction or the and friendship. The interaction or the communicative behavior which occurs is characterized by the fact that the binding norms which apply are understood and accepted by the actors involved in the situation. It can be said that the communicative actions take place within a community of values.

Using these two concepts, Habermas sketches a simple theory about society's development. He postulates that, in traditional society, there are only small segments or subsystems of goal-rational actions, and that these are confined within the limits of cultural tradition. The segments of goal-rational activity are encapsulated in the larger system of communicative activity within a binding norm-and-value community. On the other hand, in modern, capitalist society, goal-rational activity does not merely expand and win the upper hand, but eventually consumes the area of communicative actions.

In a re-structuring of Marx's outline of class ideology, Habermas acutely pinpoints this new ideology, which has permeated our society, calling it the technocratic consciousness. This consciousness is characterized not so much by unhindered exploitation and oppression as it is by loyalty to the system, a loyalty which is maintained by a so-called de-politicized distribution of benefits, that is to say, the distribution of the system's output by means of specific technical or 'objective' criteria. The consequence, which is the expulsion of morality, is decisive. Habermas refers to this expulsion by writing, "In the technocratic consciousness, we can see mirrored not only the breakdown of moral

context, but also the suppression of 'morality' as a category of life altogether." Morality is relegated to the margin, while the technical and 'objective' take a central position. Ethical and political questions, as to what is the good and the bad in human life and in society's forms do not obtain in a technocracy.

What then are the implications for adult education of Habermas' theory? There now follows a possible interpretation and application of Habermas. It can be said, that in every teaching situation there exists a potential conflict between two principles of togetherness - an instrumental-technical principle, and a value-oriented principle - and the first will normally be, by far, the stronger. The discussion which develops from the first principle will revolve around the extent to which something is appropriate, whether it is effective and efficient, and whether it can be used to fulfill tasks and solve problems. Discussion in keeping with the second principle will center around ethical and political questions in a broad sense and also at the personal level.

In other words, it is to be expected in a normal teaching situation today that it is considered legitimate to say, 'You are wrong, there', and one can say to the teacher, 'Your analysis is totally inadequate. Listen here...'. On the other hand, it is, as a rule, illegitimate to ask, 'What's the good of spending my time studying this subject?' not to mention a question like, 'Can we improve our society by sitting here doing this work?' or the plaintive little primitive question, 'Do we actually enjoy being here?' Such value-loaded questions are seldom heard and even more infrequently answered.

### Thesis 3: The Division of Labor in Society

**T**he source for thesis 2 is to be found at a still higher level: the macro-sociological niveau. The third thesis starts off on that niveau because it locates adult education phenomena in relation to society's division of labor. Our society is characterized by a division of labor which is highly specialized and which is also typified by a high degree of technology and increasing automation.

Thesis 3 reads as follows: *In adult education in our time there is a relationship of contradiction between the consideration taken of a highly specialized division of labor on the one hand and on the other hand by the need for a broader general outlook, and consideration of the first will normally be very dominant in relation to the last.*

In other words, the thesis implies that adult educational activity in our time exists in a state of structural tension. On the one hand, education aims instrumentally towards the placement or replacement of participants in the highly-specialized division of the labour structure, which, in addition, has undergone considerable changes in recent years. Even if education does not explicitly aim towards such goals, it is unavoidable that market relations make their presence felt, and indirectly influence what happens. On the other hand, a need for what can here be called a broader (horizontal) outlook manifests itself on the part of at least some of the participants, that is to say, the need to know about and understand what is going on in other disciplines, within other sectors of society, and, presumably, also within remote elements of ones own personality. The need for a broader outlook is expressed - often rather violently - by a drive to broaden out, by means of education across the curriculum, by contact with other societal sectors, as, for example, the productive, and by attempting to break down internal borderlines in the personality.

With regard to our current society, there are three important features which should be discussed in this context. Our society is highly specialized, highly technological and, increasingly, one-dimensional. The latter refers to the tendency to measure and weigh everything according to economic-quantitative criteria, and to organize all societal and human life according to such criteria. On the other side, in recent years there has appeared an interest in versatility, in life's multi-dimensions, and in actual and living variety, an interest which initially appeared under the designation of 'quality of life', an expression which emphasizes the qualitative, over the quantitative.

André Gorz's book *Écologie et liberté* (1977) represents a contribution to this tension and an extremely radical challenge to our highly specialized and highly technological society. In his book, Gorz considers the prospects of survival for, respectively, the economic and ecological systems in which we live. The economical system is carried by the logic of Capital, which demands constant expansion. The ecological system is characterized by definite, natural limitations, which limitations are becoming increasingly manifest. Gorz considers what will happen when these two systems have to be coordinated under one cohesive system.

He suggests that there are only two logical possibilities. One possibility is the society of total supervision. Our present system of registration and control will be as nothing compared to the future society. Our total consumption, our allotments of food, clothing, gasoline, information, recreation,

fresh air, social aid, health and longevity will be subsumed under technologically maintained control and regulation by the state, a state which Gorz calls eco-fascist, because economic and ecological laws and necessities will render democracy powerless.

The other possibility involves the decision to radically expand what Gorz calls the civil society, in order to drive back the State and Capital, and reconquer the areas these have long occupied. This means that people will have to join together in small groupings, where they, themselves, begin to produce food, clothing and the like for one another, to mind one another's children, instead of, as Gorz says, 'renting childminding civil servants', and, in general to administer and organize life within clearly-defined and geographical units.

Gorz has a definite point of view in regard to education. The destruction of versatility and independence begins in school and "the school primarily teaches us that, for every problem, there is a competent authority, and, for every activity, a specialist, that 'amateurs' can never be 'professional' ". He continues by describing how there is no place in the school for all of the simple functions of life.

One might designate this theme, Gorz's external determination as opposed to self determination. Furthermore, empirical evidence indicates that there is unavoidably something stultifying connected with institutional education, and that, in certain cases, self-determined activities are connected with true inner satisfaction, a satisfaction or joy which is an anthropological possibility for man, but which, at the moment, is suffocated by our societal and cultural life. At the same time as, in my opinion, this inner satisfaction is part and parcel of the Good Society, there is every reason to encourage it.

But, in the meantime, the problem remains that the highly technological society has ossified and become entrenched in a stability which time after time is underestimated, in an inhuman basic

structure which increasingly makes itself felt in daily life, a structure of fragmentation and supervision.

On the surface level the system here described manifests itself on three different planes the tendencies of which have been expressed in the three theses formulated here. It seems reasonable to describe the system in such a way that the three manifested tendencies can be said to grow out of a common core. I have attempted to describe that core under the designation 'latent structure' (Jacobsen, 1981).

As long as the above description of some predominant tendencies in society are, at least, approximately correct, it will have extraordinary consequences for the idea of lifelong education. Work towards the expansion of lifelong education will, in such a case, take place in a tension field. In this field the strong pole is called the instrumentalism of the labor market and technology, utility and alienation. The weak pole is called the simple human needs for pleasure, community, versatility, understanding, social contextualization, a broad outlook and selfdetermined activities. The danger lies in the fact that everything which the weak pole initiates risks being appropriated by the strong pole.

### An Empirical Pilot Study

**A** preliminary investigation among fifteen heterogeneously selected adult Danes shows that the above-stated theses are sufficiently fruitful and realistic to merit closer investigation. Intensive interviews were applied.

The group investigated took part in a variety of educational activities, ranging from narrowly professional goal orientation to personality-enhancing course activities.

The subjects of the investigation were asked about their motivation in commencing the course in question. (see Table 1).

**TABLE I Motivations for seeking the courses in question**

Given Motivation	Number
1 Grading, further qualification, become something else.	2
2 Dissatisfaction with job/situation pressure from or instigation by a superior and the like; the advantages of a year off, sociability with other adults.	4
3 Being able to or being forced to use or fruitfully employ in the job situation that which was learned.	8
4 Desire for personal enhancement, to be 're-charged' and the like; variety, learn more, learn something new.	6
5 Work with self, learn about oneself to be more content with self, be able to stand up and be counted.	3
Given motivations in total	23

The cited motivations for participation ranged from external (instrumental) to internal (subject-committed) promptings, with the bias being partly on a general urge to learn something new and partly on a desire to manage the work situation better.

Interview subjects were also asked about their future expectations and hopes with regard to learning activities ranged over a broad span of subjects within the natural and social sciences and the humanities. These desires appear to express great versatility and to be characterized predominantly by including something generally enriching, a greater understanding of self or of environment and the like. This feature appears quite clearly in an analysis of the value concepts linked to the educational desires. Practically speaking, these concepts are not of a technical-instrumental character at all, but of a generally human or generally developmental enriching character. *The desires for education thus appear to be strongly characterized by internal values, while the realized courses of study have a far more technical-instrumental character.*

If this result proves later to be generalizable, it will mean that *the Danes and perhaps Western European generally possess a large and varied*

*number of desires for education, which, by and large, are of a different kind and have a different direction than that which is often assumed in education's political discussion and prioritization.*

## Demotivated Adult Education and the Problems of the World

**W**hat kind of solutions can be seen as to the motivational problems, value crisis problems, methodical problems and social climate problems of Western adult education classes? What can educationalists and policy makers do with respect to such problems, which reflect technical affluence combined with socio-cultural poverty?

One way out would be to provide a stronger and clearer recognition of the factual world situation, of which the Western countries are a part, for all adult students. There is reason to believe that a stronger international commitment - for peace and decent living conditions and against oppression - would give a more firm direction to the now very loose, demotivated and casual adult studies.

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