The Triad: Grundtvig, Haret, Gusti
Outdoor education in the history of the international pedagogy

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Abstract

The study proposes a definition and historical analysis of the outdoor education that would facilitate the thorough understanding of the contemporary developments. The analysis links the Danish education, with a focus on Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig work, with the Romanian pedagogy, represented by Spiru Haret and Dimitrie Gusti, as a possible response to an invitation launched by Gusti himself in 1928: “Is it possible to set up high schools for peasants in Romania, based on Grundtvig model, not by simply copying the model, but by turning it into a typically Romanian school, adjusted to the specific interests of the Romanian village and peasant, meant to satisfy the national and state needs, that characterize only the Romanian rural society?” (Gusti, "The Culture policy and the cultural state", 1928).

Keywords: outdoor education, adult education, social pedagogy.

1. Outdoor education

Outdoor education emerged as a practical activity, following visionary ideas in various historical, social, economic contexts, hence the learning models offers the theoretical context that lays the basis of all elements that
facilitate and lead to learning. The argument that “theory explains processes, and models describe them” (Nicola, 1996, p. 126) helps outdoor education identify its substance and values within the learning models that derive from the theories of evolutionary psychology, the socio-cultural theories, the theories of learning by experience or the constructivist theories.

All these theories back up the various perspectives on the learning process and lead to redefining education. Pedagogy as such does not represent a science of teaching and does not impose norms. What has to be transmitted as a global vision differs from what I, each of us, want to know. Neutral information gets in contact with the attitude towards itself and becomes meaningful. Learning bears the responsibility of the things we learn reminding us of Immanuel Kant whose „sapere aude” requested the courage to use one’s own reason.

By gathering the educational values of various learning theories in a symbiosis of formal – non-formal/informal education, outdoor education implies a change of perspective; it does not necessarily represent a new formative method, but rather a specific pedagogical attitude, which requires interest in other experiences and perspectives. Outdoor education means to accept the dynamic of your own group, to solve difficult problems together with the others, to share the success. Teaching no longer means to convey knowledge; it means suggesting possibilities, organizing learning scenarios. The central phenomenon becomes the communication as interaction among all the actors involved, by stimulating and encouraging curiosity, inquisitive behaviour, the active attitude through: exploration, assuming initiatives, independent problem solving, allocating time for experiments, team working, experiments, granting support whenever necessary, but without exaggeration.

2. Personalities. Brief overview

A historical overview of the outdoor education reveals the significant contribution of Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig in the Danish education, of Spiru Haret and Dimitrie Gusti in Romania. An analysis of the education systems offers a framework for the definition of outdoor education in various temporal and cultural contexts.

2.1. Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig- the Danish experience

A founding member of the European Union and of the Northern Council, a member of the Council of Europe and OECD, Denmark impresses with the overall progress, which stems from the efficient work of only five million people. Education stimulates the development of the Danish society, which in its turn, finances the education. 8.8% of the GDP – more than the OECD international average - was allocated to education in 2010 as a priority for the Danish government. Danish authorities attach great importance to education as a key to the unknown and complex world of tomorrow.

The concept of outdoor education is to be found in the pedagogical theories of Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872) in the concept of education in the natural environment, which clarifies the principle of „learning by doing”. The natural environment – familiar to people - offers the framework for a harmonious development of body and mind. Education in nature stimulates the education for the environment, promoting a culture of nature and – as a consequence – a culture of learning outdoors. It is only the symbiosis body – spirit/mind that brings balance and we return to nature whenever we forget about ourselves – that is the prophetic message that has been conveyed for 200 years.

Establishing the first Folk High Schools, Grundtvig proved that the individual development is related to the others; by discovering himself, a student discovers those around him and perceives himself from the very beginning as a social individual. The Folk High Schools – unique educations institutions in the Scandinavian tradition - offer outdoor education, for and through one’s own nature. Training the body and the spirit, stimulating the musicality, reflection and creativity, assigning responsibilities and conveying good mood, this type of school aims to educate the youth so that they become aware of their own ideals and act as a member of a democratic society. „To be a man means to be aware of what means to be a man” (Slok, professor of theology) it is the principle which summarizes the philosophy of the Folk High Schools.
The value attached to green spaces and, consequently to the open-air lessons, supported the development of outdoor education in Denmark. The environment became a specific learning context for certain subjects: mathematics, languages and literature, history etc. The outdoor education, or „udeskole” in Danish, is a local development project. It is initiated by a teacher or a group of teachers of a particular school and is not part of the national curriculum. These development projects are part of the Danish model of free education, which makes it possible to develop new pedagogical ideas and methods based on the interpretation of the national curriculum. „Thus, „Udeskole” emerged as a phenomenon initiated by teachers, as a spontaneous counterculture reaction to the existing teaching methods. Officially the outdoor education is not part of the national curriculum, yet the general learning objectives refer to practical experience, the contact with nature, securing the coherence of the educational activities in and out of school. Emerged as a project initiated by a group of teachers the phenomenon has spread widely and, according to recent data, it is estimated that 28% of the Danish schools implement outdoor education programs for children aged 7 – 16 years. The activities are carried out weekly or twice a week and are called „open-air school days”. The target subjects are natural sciences, biology, language and communication, mathematics (Betsen, & Jensen, 2010). The website www.udeskole.dk was launched in 2006 with the aim to support these successful educational activities”.

To sum up, a Danish outdoor education program is conducted outside the classroom, mainly in nature; it has a regular frequency (once a week); it is part of the curriculum; it has a specific duration for a certain school cycle (at least 4 hours during a school year); it is related to the subjects in the formal curriculum (Betsen, 2010). The research recommends cooperation strategies among researchers, local administration and the actors in education in order to improve the „udeskole” impact and offer in the Danish school system, as well as the support of political initiatives aimed to protect and develop the environment. The Danish educational system gives attaches great importance to school for life ideas, thus continuing Grundtvig’s vision.

2.2. Haret, Gusti - the outdoor education in the history of Romanian pedagogy

The outdoor education is considered a contemporary approach in Romania, yet unstructured forms of this education activity can be easily identified in the history of Romanian education, in Gusti and Haret’s the pedagogical conceptions.

“We should not hide the fact that school is getting out of school. It spreads everywhere, penetrating the society in order to dominate it” – said Nicolae Iorga, more than one hundred years ago, in a surprisingly modern vision. Iorga’s efforts continued Haret’s activity. Establishing schools for adults, literature circles, libraries, cultural circles and theatres represent actions that supported and stimulated education in the rural areas in the 1900s. According to Haret, the teacher’s mission goes beyond school; he has the moral duty of an „apostle”: „If a teacher considered that his mission was over after delivering a quantity of knowledge and fulfilling the responsibilities he was paid for, then he would be a good clerk, but would not deserve the glory of an apostle and would not be a good patriot. The teacher should learn to make better not only the children, but all those that need to be educated and enlightened. That is why we have strived to use the teacher’s capacities outside the school, to the benefit of people’s education, for a better intellectual, moral and economic life (Haret, 1903, p. 139). The „teacher as an apostle” vision is illustrated by an impressive statement of Ioan Antonovici, a teacher from Bârlad, who recalls the inspections for teachers (in a recording of prof. Lauren iu Şoitu, 1974):

„You asked me about the inspections. They were one-week long. They started on a Saturday and ended the next Saturday. We accompanied the teacher to church, weddings and funerals. On the first two days, Saturday and Sunday, we got acquainted. During the week after classes, I would work with him in the fields, in the forest, anywhere.”

- But you barely mentioned the classes.
- This is something you don’t understand now. You believe that a teacher is good of he goes to school daily, if he is in the classroom during the school hours. You forget that, where he lives, he is more important outside school. He is an educator for the whole town or village. It is there that I want to see him, and I also want to see him
at his home. Actually, where could I have stayed, if not with his family? If he had something to hide, he managed
to do it for one, two or three days, but eventually I would have seen it."

Spiru Haret supported the extension of the teacher’s responsibilities beyond school and, during his first mandate
as a minister of education (1897-1899) he took the task of organizing extracurricular activities. During his second
mandate (1901-1904) the extracurricular activity became official and compulsory to everyone and the results were
remarkable during his third mandate (1907-1910). Various documents, decisions, official resolutions, many
studies, defined the content, the tools and the methodology of organizing and developing extracurricular activities.

The popular gatherings – where people would work and at the same time tell stories, sing etc – represent a traditional
cultural form in the Romanian villages and played an important part in the extracurricular activity. In the early 20th
century, Spiru Haret paid special attention to these collective forms and included them in the school activities.
Based on field information, the Circular letter of 24 July 1902 recommended the school inspector to support the
existing popular gatherings and encourage new ones. The first 104 such popular gatherings were recorded in
Covurlui County (Galati) in 1907-1908, mainly in the villages. The Regulations of adult schools (1904) organized
the popular gatherings as an activity of the free courses within the schools for adults.

The Law of the secondary and higher education (23 March 1898), which introduced the practical stage in
agriculture, the provisions of the Law of primary education of 1896, which obliged schools to have vegetable
gardens, the Circular letter of 1902, which recommended students to start a small garden at home, just like the one
they had at school – are documents that encouraged the extracurricular activity. Haret initiated an ample campaign
meant to encourage the agricultural activities: an award for the best school garden, convenient loans for teachers,
the ‘plant a tree’ celebration (1902); extending the plots to 2 hectares for each school (1902), creation the system
of itinerant teachers in agriculture (1902).

By organizing school’s celebrations, conferences, choirs, trips to historical places Haret’s outdoor education
developed as a form of extracurricular activity - as part of the educational efforts in the rural areas, with a national
caracter - as well as a form of adult education – diminishing the literacy rate by initiating courses for adults and
improving the economic situation in the rural areas as a result of the practical character of the school activities.

Between the two World Wars, Dimitrie Gusti’s pedagogy had a multidimensional character: it tackled both
urban and rural areas, in a socio-cultural approach, by direct research and field work, and developed a theory of
education and learning directly influenced by his sociological vision promoted by the ‘Monographic School in
Bucharest’. His pedagogical theory became part of the educational policy aimed at reforming the educational
system in 1932-1933, when Gusti was the minister of education, cults and culture.

In 1928, analyzing the phenomenon of the Danish folk universities, in a public speech entitled „The policy of
culture and the cultural state”, delivered at the Romanian Social Institute, Dimitri Gusti declared his admiration
towards the Danish system: „Is it possible to set up high schools for peasants in Romania, based on Grundtvig
model, not by simply copying the model, but by turning it into a typically Romanian school, adjusted to the
specific interests of the Romanian village and peasant, meant to satisfy the national and state needs, that
characterize only the Romanian rural society?” (Gusti, "The Culture policy and the cultural state", 1928).

This typically Romanian school - whose purpose was to „support, complete and further the educational activity
of the parents, school, the church and the employers” – had an impact on the Folk University in Valenii de Munte
(N. Iorga), the Peasant University in Roșa-Stâncea (L. Țopa), The High Peasant School in Tg. Fierbinți (St. Stoian),
The High Peasant School in Poiana Campina (G.T. Dumitrescu), under the patronage of D. Gusti and the Royal
Cultural Foundation „Principele Carol”, the Folk University in Ungureni (E. Neculau), bringing to fruition the
vision, objectives and activity of those who believed in the unlimited power of education.

3. Conclusions

The question raised almost 90 years ago by Dimitrie Gusti “Is it possible to set up high schools for peasants in
Romania, based on Grundtvig model, not by simply copying the model, but by turning it into a typically Romanian
school, adjusted to the specific interests of the Romanian village and peasant” becomes an invitation for reflection.
All the activities realized under great names as Iorga, Haret, Gusti demonstrate the great impact of the education.
The Romanian educational history demonstrates that the education based on real principles and values makes possible the body – spirit/mind symbiosis that brings balance. The Grundtvig invitation to bring the education to the roots, to the origins, to the (human) nature, to return to nature whenever we forget about ourselves – demonstrate through years and nations the validity.

References