

Summary of PhD thesis

„Conceptualisations of education. The European dimension of education”

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Key words:

The European dimension of education, the concept of education, the concept of university, Bildung, Halbbildung (Half-education), Unbildung (un-education), europeanisation, globalization, the knowledge society, the wisdom society.

The PhD thesis titled “Conceptualisations of education. The European Dimension of Education” aims at creating a basis for the possible debate regarding the European dimension of education, by proposing its conceptualisation. The phrase “the European dimension of education” that became a very common one in the last two decades, has first appeared within the context of the European educational policies; nevertheless, its meaning may be interpreted on a much wider area of thought. The paper presents an intersection point between the fields of educational theory, pedagogy, history of European culture and education, philosophy and educational policies, offering a clarification and an enrichment of the meaning of the phrase *the European dimension of education* by connecting it with philosophical approaches of the concept of education. The innovation of the paper consists precisely in this enrichment of the meaning of the *European dimension of education*.

The context chosen for delineating the proposed concept is the one of modernity, because in order to understand the issues today’s society comes against as well as the contemporary vision of the concept of education, it is necessary to understand modernity and the changed it brought along. Because of this reason, the present paper includes a

presentation of the wider context of modernity, followed by a presentation of the process of Europeanization and its implications.

In order to achieve the objective set for the paper, namely the conceptualization of the European dimension of education, it is important to establish the relationship between the concepts of education and university, and these are presented in Chapter 1.

The concept of university has its roots in the relationship between education and science. Education means also the pragmatic acquiring of knowledge about oneself and about the world, as well as the reflection upon this knowledge. In this line of thought, the idea of the university where resides the idea of the science as well as the spiritual penetration of the world in order to acquire knowledge cannot be separated from the idea of education. This close relationship between the two concepts is reflected both in the philosophical writings discussed in the paper as well as in the term “the European dimension of education”, which includes also the university education.

Chapter 2 presents a series of philosophical approaches of the concept of education – that of the German classical idealism, the critical one of Friedrich Nietzsche, the one of the critical theory of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, the functionalist one of Talcott Parsons and Niklas Luhmann, that of the universal pragmatics of Jürgen Habermas, that of the social critic of Konrad Paul Liessmann and Richard Münch – which becomes the philosophical support for the conceptualisation of the European dimension of education.

Chapter 3 presents a delineation of the concept of the European dimension of education, which may become the support of further debates on this topic, trying to answer the questions: *What is understood through the European dimension of education?, Is there indeed a real need of becoming aware of it and of supporting it in a pragmatically organised manner or is it just an ideology created in order to cover a void of legitimacy of the*

European processes of educational reform? while suggesting new horizons for the development of this concept.

Sub-chapter 3.1. follows the description of the context in which is situated the definition of the concept of the European dimension of education; this context is the paradigm of modernity and the process of Europeanization, which involves in its turn the definition of the European cultural specificity and the crisis of the European identity seen through the prism of a number of its components (the crisis of culture, of democracy, of the concept of education).

Sub-chapter 3.2. presents the definition of the concept of European dimension of education, outlining it from the point of view of three approaches, namely the one of the European educational policies, the one of the educational sciences and pedagogy and the philosophical one.

From the point of view of the European educational policy and of the processes of reform that are in full swing, it may be understood as a regional form of the internationalisation of education, defined through its objectives regarding the development of mobility, the scientific cooperation, the formation of European citizenship and identity. It is mentioned that the realisation of these objectives, even if they regard both the international and individual level, took place mainly at institutional level.

From the point of view of the educational sciences and pedagogy, the European dimension may be interpreted as a re-actualisation of the cosmopolitan concept of education, understood today on an ideational plan as opposed to nationalism, and on the plan of its manifestations as a synonym for multiculturalism, involving the idea of tolerance, acceptance of diversity and multiple identity. Through this, local becomes trans-local, regional trans-regional, national trans-national and global. Pedagogy reacted to this process in the USA, Canada as well as in Europe starting with the 1970s, by elaborating new

educational concepts such as peace education, intercultural education, citizenship education and democracy education.

From the point of view of the philosophical approaches, the European dimension is defined as a mirroring of the elements of the European cultural specificity in the concept of education.

From the point of view of the critical approach of Richard Münch and Konrad Paul Liessmann, the European dimension may be considered as a transnational educational concept of the global culture. This meaning, however, involves an impoverishment of the concept of education, its reduction from the “formation of the whole person” (Bildung) to the training of human capital (Unbildung).

After presenting “what is” the European dimension at this time, the paper proposes a presentation of the issues raised by this concept and an image of “what could become” the European dimension through an enrichment of its meaning.

As a conclusion of chapter 3.1., we may conclude that the central problem of the European specificity, as well as of the concept of education and implicitly of the European dimension in education is the loss of balance between its internal elements.

What in the case of the European specificity is a loss of balance between the reciprocal relationships of the elements of production, economy, administration, policy and spiritual culture caused by the spreading of the model of economic thinking, which infiltrated increasingly stronger in the sub-systems of politics and spiritual culture, in the case of the concept of education we can speak about a loss of balance between its basic processes – individualisation and socialisation.

The loss of this balance lead to numerous consequences which form a series of burning issues in the field of education, which are presented in subchapter 3.2.4.. I consider

it to be very important the presentation of these issues and the opening of the discussions about them, even if the present paper does not offer definite solutions.

One of the central problems of education in our age, as stated by Liesmann as well, is the lack of a normative idea of education, because the idea of education, as it has been conceived in the Neo-Humanism for the self-formation of the human being, stopped being an objective and measure for the production of science, in its teaching and learning. The result of this loss is that education was reduced to professional education, teaching to informing, and science and knowledge were degraded to a measurable indicator of the human capital.

In this sense, the education which no longer includes the idea of education with a normative function may be considered *un-education*, if we are to use Liesmann's phrase. In Adorno and Liesmann's critical spirit, *un-education* does not mean the lack of knowledge nor a form of the lack of culture, but rather the management of science and knowledge while ignoring the idea of human Bildung.

The distancing from the idea of Bildung is obvious in the very centres of education. Liesmann considers the re-setting of the so-called educational objectives on skills as an indicator of this distancing. The orientation of educational objectives towards competencies raises in itself a number of questions, such as: *If the educational objectives, in order to achieve an educational process as good as possible, had to be aimed towards the essence of the concept of education, which would this be? Are competencies alone the basic elements of education? Could the re-setting of the educational objectives on skills lead to a suspension of individuality, which used to be the addressee and the actor of education?*

Liesmann suggests a solution, starting from the premises that un-education is a consequence of the capitalisation of the spirit. He proposes that the entire educational theory

of today were measured by what it used to be understood in Antiquity by “the perfectibility of the Human Being” (Bildbarkeit der Menschen).

Another issue arising in connection to the European dimension of education is the one concerning the limitations of the European dimension within the context of the process of globalisation. We may ask *What are the limitations of the European dimension? What is lost and what is gained as a result of the European dimension of education? How much of the national educational traditions are lost in the national competencies and what is the benefit for education, the national educational systems and the individuals of this dimension?*

As we established in chapter 3.2.1., the concept of the European dimension of education, gradually increasing its context through the perspective of educational policies, pertains to the processes of Europeanization, internationalisation and globalisation.

According to the theory of John Meyer and Richard Münch, in the context of globalisation becomes dominant a world culture (Weltkultur), which brings with itself the homogenisation of the models in general and which could be considered the most influential force at play in the constitution of national states, of organisations and of individuals. Münch speaks even about the instauration of an “economic imperialism” which would be the result of the expansion of economic thinking which penetrated, among other fields, the fields of education and science as well.

From the point of view of the economic modernization of society, Münch defines the *knowledge society* as a society whose economy is based on knowledge and in which knowledge becomes an economic resource. Consequently, the relationship between the human being and knowledge is the one between a good and an individual, and the investment in knowledge becomes an entrepreneurial issue of the knowledge market dominated by competition. In this sense, the smallest entrepreneur is the individual, who invests in his education with the aim of transforming it in human capital.

Under such conditions, changes both the understanding of the sense of education as well as its function in society, function that Münch defines as “serving the production of human capital which brings profit is the aim and purpose of the new educational capitalism”. Thus, the diagnosis of education in the contemporary society established by Münch is “the previous paradigm of education which considers education as cultural good and specialized knowledge is being fully replaced by a new economic model”. This process of a shift of paradigm is supported through the differentiation of the networks of transnational actors (for instance, educational experts), institutions (for instance, OECD, EU) which exercise a power that is especially symbolic and displace from their position of power the national actors and institutions (for instance, ministries of education, school inspectorates).

Münch and Liessmann consider to be dazzling examples of the transformation of education into the production of human capital, as well as a degradation of the concept of education, the educational standards of the PISA testing and of the Bologna process, which are aimed at creating a European higher education space, as both processes subject different national educational traditions to a global educational concept which goes beyond the borders of Europe.

Richard Münch’s conclusion, after analysing the PISA testing and the Bologna Process from Germany is that both processes are engines of the transformation of education that will lead to the complete replacement of the educational ideal seen as a cultural good and specialized knowledge through the education model seen as competency-based human capital.

Münch sees the profound cause of this transformation in the shift of the symbolic power from the national educational elite towards a knowledge elite organised transnationally, by developing and establishing networks of transnational institutions and

actors. In this manner was set in motion a process which auto-creates its resources of maintenance, connecting its legitimacy structures with the new educational paradigm.

As a result of this transformation, hybrid structures are born, which no longer correspond to the previous vision of education, but are not yet capable of corresponding to the realisation of the new paradigm in education.

It is obvious that the meaning of the concept of education degraded over the centuries, or, put another way, during the very quick technical-economical, informational and social development of the European culture and/or society was neglected the establishment of a concordance between the changes of the society and the full meaning of the concept of education.

The causes for the degradation are multiple, among which are the penetration and dominance of the economical thinking model in the field of education, the degradation of the value of knowledge to a product, the precedence of production of human capital in relation to the *Bildung* of the whole individual, the decrease in the importance of morality in the society of knowledge and implicitly in the educational process.

All these causes and effects are rooted, as Nietzsche observed, in the intellectual culture based on rationalism at the level of the self-understanding of the individual, because education reflects the thinking of the individual about himself.

In the knowledge society, in which, after the colonising of the Lifeworld by the actions of the functionalistic systems, even the individual is considered to be an enterprise that orients itself towards the maximising of its own profit investing in its own education, the individual forgets how to be human.

We may ask ourselves, where can be found in the knowledge society the moral values of the humanistic education, the life lives in an authentic manner and the reflexive

critique which allows the self-determination of the individual – being competencies of the concept of education in the philosophical vision from the European context of modernity?

If we are to open new perspectives regarding the European dimension of education, it is mandatory on one hand to re-evaluate the concept of education, to balance the relationship between its basic elements, and on the other to balance the above-mentioned components of the European specificity, process that reflects itself on the entire knowledge society.

It is certain that the elements of the concept of education resulting from the various approaches presented in Chapter 2, such as the moral values of the humanist education, the life lived in an authentic manner, the reflexive critique which allows the self-determination of the individual and the living of a successful life cannot be achieved and mediated only through the institutionalised education because it does not guarantee to offer these aspects of the concept of education. All these aspects remain at the will of the freedom of choice and of the process of self-formation of the individual.

Expectations regarding education are high even today, creating even more illusions in what concerns education than there have been once, a fact that reflects itself in the educational concepts that try to solve society's problems. Using Nietzsche's term, the schools of today are "institutions of vital needs", because the needs of every day life burden the schools with multiple tasks, such as family surrogate (families which fall apart within society), place of emotional communication, institution that searches for solutions for a wide range of problems from the world of adults – such as: pollution of the environment, wars, the issue of immigrant integration, cultural conflicts.

Blinded by these expectations, the aim of the process of Bildung of the individual is reduced to the one carried out within the institutionalised education and the limits of the institutionalised education are overseen. This can no longer find solutions for all the problems of the society.

Institutionalised education represents only a stage in the life and *Bildung* of the individual, which may insure a framework for the individual and social development. Today's individual is willing to learn all throughout his life in order to be able to adapt to the requirements of the rapidly-changing labour market; however, as Liessmann said "this is not even the caricature of the learned individual sketched by W. von Humboldt in his "Theory of Human *Bildung*", because it lacks the power of the synthesising thinking."

Human *Bildung* is a life-long project of the individual of educating himself, if we are to use the concepts of Humboldt and Nietzsche, human *Bildung* is the penetration of our person by the concept of *humanity*, living its most profound sense possible, and *humanity* means a continuous self-overcoming.

Such a re-evaluation and individual application of the concept of education can offer a widening of the horizon of understanding the European dimension of education through the development of the knowledge society towards a wisdom society, theorised by Nicholas Maxwell.

Nicholas Maxwell analyses the need to move from a knowledge society towards a wisdom society, and the manner in which the university interacts with wisdom. Maxwell's starting point is the premises according to which the basic aim of intellectual investigation is increasing the knowledge. In Maxwell's point of view, there is an imperative need of a revolution in what regards the aims and methods of academic investigation, so that its fundamental purpose would become promoting wisdom, defined as the capacity of realising what is of value for oneself and for others, thus creating knowledge and technological know-how. Maxwell considers that the academic enquire, instead of being preoccupied with the solving of the problems of knowledge would rather have to deal prioritarily with the task of discovering possible solutions for the problems of life.

In his vision, education plays an important role in this process, as it has to change itself so that life's problems became more important, more of a priority and more fundamental than the problems connected to obtaining knowledge, and the fundamental aim of education would be learning how to acquire wisdom in life.

The European dimension of education is a new paradigm under which the whole meaning of the concept of education should be revised. Development and debate on the topic of these possible perspectives of the European dimension of education and of the concept of education are the task of the future.