

THE FUTURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

The role of schools would be to acknowledge the importance of studying environmental education. This is a process comprising several factors: political, social, economic. Moreover, school must implement this Environmental Awareness.

Key words: interdisciplinarity /, cooperation, quality instead of quantity/, combination of theory with practice/, involvement/, awareness.

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In the period following the 2nd World War, in Europe – there have been set up more universities than in 750 years from the setting up of the University of Bologna and Paris in 1200 – until 1945.

Therefore we can notice not only a great number of universities but also a great number of students.

Between 1938-1939, 56.000 women and men would attend academic studies which represent less than a half of the people studying at the Universities of Berlin or Munich, Cluj, Bucharest.

In many European countries, more than half of young people are university graduates. Therefore, we can call it a real market in full expansion.

Though these facts are true, I would not like to compare it to the economic market, as this is rather science. Nevertheless, in the future we could talk about it as such.

A symposium was organized at Berlin on this topic with the participation of various university teaching staff. This symposium was aimed at making clearer the future of European universities as well as their future responsibilities and attributions. I decided to participate in the symposium as I was convinced that the issues of environmental education in the European Universities would become a hot topic for debates in the future.

I tried to exemplify this discourse in 7 theses.

First of all, I will try to outline environmental community, the changes that occurred in the course of time as well as the role of university. The other 2 theses refer to the essence of university. These 5 and 6 outline university modernization by means of the line of reasoning imposed by Humboldts, while the 7th thesis refers to own experience and opinions about this symposium.

1st thesis: "Universities are wonderful examples of an urbanization process and reality which resemble an open process and the desire to preserve it, on a long-term. They provide in Europe a community mirror. The expansion of university study cannot be prevented".

Universities appear where cultural, political and community's problems as well as the whole complex issue of knowledge and practice can no longer be controlled and which require a scientific solution.

Just one example – the problem of transports, we could notice the diversity and complexity of methods, relations which go beyond boundaries and which shall bring about the communication as well as getting acquainted with several problems. Gradually, various Cities shall come together for this purpose (political, economic, cultural, ...) and shall bring about a number of cultural and family standards. Political, economic, structural, regional, family, elements of differentiation between East and West shall be added to these.

All these problems, questions, critics shall bring about the need for specialists which should be well trained both theoretically and practically. Therefore, the teaching staff in 1200 different cities developed cooperation relations intended to certify a certain university study and their study certificates should be recognized all over Europe.

Opening the negotiations, broadening of experience horizon intensified both historically, physically and biologically but it also went deeper.

The "literacy" as well as "money" item which, in the Middle Ages, were mainly owned only by wealthy people, become gradually a social and a generally valid need.

The process of urbanization in the whole world shall extend into Europe the issue of ecological and cultural differentiation from town to village. Rationality, communication, information, techniques shall determine the basic modern community elements. Being opened to other cultural forms shall become a hot issue in the coming future. And this is how I get to

2nd thesis « Europe needs education, as the greatest part of the community, to participate in scientific knowledge not only for its use as a profession but also for a better understanding of scientific world".

Until the 2nd World War we could encounter specializations in agriculture, industry, trade ... Currently, modern community requires more (e.g. master's degree).

Therefore, after 1950 the number of universities has greatly increased. It means that the spectrum of theoretical knowledge of some problems has increased, specialists are born, teaching staff is provided support for their research and they further acquire the status of "universities".

The expansion of universities after the 2nd World War shall bring about not only the increase in the number of study offers but also of places of study. Some of them have immediately become universities, other have started as vocational, technical and poly-technical schools providing with a higher level of knowledge.

E.g., see Turkey after 1982, Great Britain, 1992 ...

University system has radically changed after 1950. Universities shall spread all over Europe and we shall come to notice the differences between centers and professions and various specializations. I think it is important not to stick at, not to hold only on the titled received but on the Individual Quality and Capacity!

What will be the true role of university?

This is:

3^rd thesis. "The important function of universities is to create, educate scientifically and create the specialist."

Let's take the example of holding the title of PhD student.

This title means a deeper symbol.

In 1799, king Wilhelm Fridrich of Berlin set up an academy for the training of the future members of the teaching staff. The essence shall not be the title but to be able to convey, to pass on to other persons the knowledge acquired.

This king has asked a very important thing which is, unfortunately, very often, ignored and overlooked by universities, that to combine Theory and Practice!

The title of Master's Degree, the title of PhD student also brings along the attribution to possess independently a certain subject matter. These days, all the people in a university are generally prepared professionally, but practicing generally requires a state examination.

This shall be accompanied by a lifelong continuous study in order to keep the pace with reality (economic, political, cultural...)

4th thesis "The major role of universities is study, that is to learn scientifically, to research "truth" methodically, to prepare academicians and to combine profession with practice!"

A special trend has been noticed for a long time: those who study want to become teachers. In order to do so, it is necessary to possess scientific, rational knowledge but also to have a special previous training.

Universities shall provide with intellectual certainty where it is also possible to encounter conflicts, standards which might be reflected in theses and anti-theses of a teaching process comprised in a logical synthesis.

Reducing this complexity to a logical basis, for alternative settlement shall be considered as a triumph of theory!

This is highly criticized by humanists claiming the fact that university is often reduced to theory, without providing real solutions for the problems with which humankind must cope.

Just as the Gothic element has encountered Renaissance element and then the Baroque, humanism means a way of thinking, starting from man to man, starting from experience.

The central point of this symposium shall focus on this dilemma but also on the dynamic elements in Europe in the last years.

The fact that some people are practicing along with theory (see the case of medical doctors, judges, attorneys-at-law and professors) will be difficultly accepted by universities. The greatest part of practice shall be performed outside faculties. And much knowledge shall be further acquired in practice – further comprised in a theoretical study and research.

Unfortunately, presently we notice this state of separation of theory from practice as it was originally the case in the Soviet universities. This is why the future of universities shall be based on Humboldt's methods and reforms (to combine theory and practice).

5th thesis "One of the main attributions of modern universities, according to Humboldt, is to keep science at the stage of research".

We have an absolute example of modern university in Berlin, but which is greatly criticized in almost all Germany.

This "Humboldtian" model shall comprise a great number of young people – yet its validity and participation shall be questioned.

This issue shall be regarded in a completely different way by American people who will appreciate this model. This model shall make us think and shall be deeply examined.

Following the French Revolution, in France, the emphasis shall be laid on vocational schools (and, to a great extent, this is also the case in Romania). It is only after 1990, this type of university study shall extend greatly.

According to Humboldt, research shall never stop in universities as it is a continuous process, while in schools it is a clear and precise process.

"Man in university is in a permanent research!"

It involves freedom, but also loneliness, isolation from practical life through which the student will live close to other students and to research.

This liberal method proposed by Humboldt and put into practice in Berlin shall be also tightly connected to politics.

Humboldt is not the only promoter of this university model. These endeavors of professors and students in the seminar and lab made career so that research work becomes compulsory for the series of PhD students.

This model of the University of Berlin has been taken over from other universities in the Central and Eastern Europe. It has changed and

consolidated the French model and spread throughout the whole world. This model proposed by Humboldt was spread and has been initially mirrored in state schools, first in the technical ones, then in commercial ones and subsequently in the schools specialized in the training of the teaching staff. A special emphasis has been laid on science, research and thus a first differentiation between school and university shall be made.

6th thesis “In the future, the European university system shall differentiate from the vocational system by laying a further emphasis on research”.

Humboldt will point out this differentiation between school and university, not only from the psychological point of view.

He was like a king in explaining rational thinking and its relation to practice. In his opinion, people shall expect more from schools than that clearly outlined package of knowledge. He was against the authoritarian school (for instance, Napoleon’s school).

On the other hand, Humboldt shall be a realist, as in the model of university he has conceived, he would notice that students will be interested, to a great extent, only in the theoretical aspects. This is why he would plead for the use of examples and practice!

At the same time, he has been aware that we must possess that package of theoretical knowledge in order to be able to handle them subsequently (analysis, criticism...)

Taken on a whole, only a few universities shall deal with the title of master’s degree and PhD degree in the work of research.

The model proposed by Humboldt shall be almost entirely taken over by the Americans within their academic system (College).

The future will be based on a professional qualification in a certain trade, and on the other hand, on the promotion of the work of research – as is the only path to capture the entire number of universities. This is why the role of specialized faculties (Fachhochschule) shall become an issue to be debated in the future.

This differentiation between universities in the various European countries shall become a central issue. Various programs of research of the European Union or organizations of research of Strasbourg propose the joint cooperation work of various institutions, the joint work of various researches.

We shall encounter this model proposed by Humboldt, (to combine the students and the research with a common interest, to start a dialogue between students and pupils, to raise their awareness for this relation) in Germany and in Romania after 1990.

This is the only way we could explain this brilliant, almost perfect cooperation between researchers and young people, even though this

involve higher social costs to allow an academic professional educational qualification. This lead to:

7th thesis "Research-type education shall have not only the role to bring light over these unknown and unfamiliar aspects (through research), but also to allow making a decision for the public interest. This shall depend on the personal education of every individual, on relations, situations, consequences which make a research a useful one (Sinn) and which shall increase the degree of responsibility for mankind and environment").

This thesis is a real synthesis of this article!!!

I would like to bring into light these aspects through my own experienced feelings.

I acquired the basic element of an Environmental Education from parents. To throw away a piece of bread was regarded as a sin by my family. Waste (such as paper, plastic) was to be reused.

Packages of various objects were used for other purposes. Then the compost (household waste) elements shall be separated from those of a different nature. Even the words used, I was not allow to make them "dirty", to use dirty words.

This type of Environmental Education is to be found and is clearly mirrored in Germany!

The fact that water, light, heat could not be maintained and surveyed without the help of man is now a certain fact. This is why, the fact that environmental education must start from family shall not be regarded as a naïve attitude and it shall be the basis for a future trade!

Environmental Education is, first of all, a Social Duty which, by and through the family or by playing (which, at the beginning, has nothing to do with school, study, research – turns subsequently into a serious thing!

Just an example:

A professor at the University of Zurich would teach Biology in 1937. In 1937 he would act as an active member of a Fishermen organization and he would show an increase concern for water (drinking water, water purification).

Due to his research and various private discourses, Professor Jaag had many publications on research, water pollution and proposed a number of measures.

Local people regarded him as a fanatic and people would laugh at him. Further on, he was promoted as the leader of the ETH (water, pollution) group. In 1942, by means of younger teaching staff he succeeded in transposing this concept which began to be taught in schools.

This is what we should do with Environmental Education too !!!

From this example, the following 5 necessary elements can be distinguished for a successful environmental education.

- 1- uncertainty, anxiety of the people who are directly involved become a critical issue.
- 2- research (which has not been yet acknowledged in public) will be regarded as a problem
- 3- the ethos of the members of the teaching staff will be important, that is the way they will convey and impose this respective knowledge;
- 4- the ethos of the members of the teaching staff – the way they get and pass on knowledge and inform on facts;
- 5- the quintessence of study: to help students acquire knowledge and negotiate in a correct manner, based on this knowledge, and thus become responsible towards people, getting also citizens involved in this process.

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