

## A renewed paradigm of enlightenment

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*"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."*

Article 1 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights,  
adopted by General Assembly resolution of 10 December 1948.

The predefined task is to highlight new knowledge and experiences that can provide inspiration for new paradigms of importance for our future civilization. But it could imply a guiding question. Because who says, we need to think of something new, maybe we instead should make the best of the not quite so new ideas and defend them against the newest mainstream ideas. In order to bridge the gap between the history of our past and the future we are heading towards.

### Humanism and democracy

The European traditions of humanistic enlightenment are the conceptual basis for the principles of human rights and democracy, and they are the basis for the constitutions of most modern societies. They also gave inspiration to the American Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the French Revolution in 1789, especially the motto of *liberty, equality and fraternity*. If we are looking for modern values and ideas with universal aspirations for the 21st century, we should find them here.

Immanuel Kant formulated in 1784 the idea of modern liberal enlightenment as man's release from his self-incurred tutelage and courage to use his own reason. This idea expressed that an anthropocentric paradigm gradually had replaced a deocentric paradigm, where the order of man and society were determined by Good or tradition. Hereby politic as well as pedagogy became secular. Now people themselves should determine the meaning and goals of society and be masters of their own history. This is the core of modern humanism.

It is man's historic emergence as a free and autonomous individual, which generates the new demands of democracy. Behind the sovereignty of the people, behind the political rights of the people stands the civil rights. It is the citizen's rights of freedom, the freedom of thought, the freedom of speech, and the freedom of association and assemble, which created the basis for political rights and duties. A strong civil society with active citizenship, popular adult education and a vivid third sector of voluntary associations and NGO's was the precondition for the development (and preservation) of politic rights and democracy.

### State, market and civil society

A new self-conscious man had stepped into the arena of society, but it soon turned out that this modern man appeared in several roles, both as a person and a fellow human being in the personal and private matters (l'homme), as employee and employed on the market (bourgeois), and as citizen (citoyen) in the public and civil society.

Modern societies are characterized by a differentiation of society and life spheres. This differentiation has been a major progress for civilisation. It provides both space for a productive working life, a responsible active citizenship and a rich personal life. But it also implies that the ideal of human autonomy becomes more contradictory. After the great revolutions in the late 1700s, it soon became clear that the ideal of human autonomy was not realized. It was rather the market's "invisible hand" that came in control, and the writings were made by the bourgeois class with "red ink". Worse yet, when the people had the power in the French Revolution, it ended in mob ruling and terror.

A leading educational and political response to this challenge was the German philosophy of Bildung, the neo-humanism from the late 1700s, and the Danish Grundtvigian popular enlightenment

from the mid 1800s. Here the ideal of human autonomy was still in front, but the new challenge was to ensure both the personal freedom and the public interest. The primary goal of education was not to be educated to a private career as bourgeois, but to be educated to fellowship and citizenship as l'homme and citoyen.

The German term "Bildung" refers to this dialectic with reference to the verb "to form" and the noun "picture or model". It has the double meaning, on the one hand freely to form oneself, and on the other hand to do this with reference to the common good. Here, personal self-reflection and social and cultural reflection are interrelated. It was the larger world orientation, the broader cultural understanding and the general moral responsibility that was on the agenda. The enlightened citizen with the perspective of global citizenship was the ideal.

### **One-dimensional society**

The differentiation of society and the life spheres implies or rather requires that our rationality has become more differentiated, too. The critical theory of the Frankfurt School in general and of Jürgen Habermas particularly has highlighted the modern rationality. On the one hand the use of technical-instrumental rationality in the system world including state and market, on the other hand the use of communicative and expressive rationality in the life world including the public sphere and the civil society

The life-world constitutes the common horizons of understanding in society, and it is conditional for our mutual communication and development of personal identity. Here we interpret and create meaning and purpose in life. Its basis is a strong civil society and a free public debate, and without it our personal as well as democratic communication fall apart. In the life world we primarily act as fellow human beings and citizens.

The system-world comprises the market and the state, where money and power are the media for a constant demand of increased yield and efficiency. Here dominates the instrumental rationality with focus on the most effective means to ensure the material, economic and legal basis for prosperity and welfare. In the system world we primarily act as staff, students, consumers and clients.

Modern society has or should have an effective system world as well as a rich life world. The two worlds cannot do without each other, but the instrumental rationality rooted in the market and the state has a tendency to colonize the communicative rationality in the life world, even though the system world depends on a free life world. Because meaning, solidarity and personal identity cannot be produced commercially or administratively.

A society without a rich life world is not just a poor community spiritually and humanly speaking, it is a one-dimensional society, where the nerve of society - a vibrant culture, a free public debate and a participatory democracy with active citizenship - dries out.

### **Paradigm dispute on lifelong learning**

The idea of lifelong learning is not new. In the European history of ideas the humanistic tradition has always seen education and enlightenment as essential for human freedom and growth.

For the ancient Greeks the most important value was to acquire knowledge about the world and themselves, thus becoming a full human being and citizen. The same value characterises the Renaissance and Enlightenment, and especially the German neo-humanism considered life as a lifelong and unfinished enlightenment towards wisdom. The Nordic folk high school has also promoted a lifelong education for the sake of personal fulfilment, human fellowship, active citizenship and a responsible work life. Grundtvig saw enlightenment as the meaning of the individual life and as the goal of the common history.

But the concept of "lifelong learning" has in the last decades mainly gain influence, because two important international organisations had been its advocates, namely UNESCO from the early 1970'ies and OECD from the 1980'ies, and they speak of lifelong learning from two very different understandings.

UNESCO links lifelong learning to human and democratic development. Here education is as an end in itself, and not merely a mean for economic growth and government management. For exam-

ple, the need for literacy was justified by each human beings need and right to gain access to knowledge and culture. The OECD on the contrary understands lifelong learning as an investment in 'human capital' and emphasises the commercial advantages. The humanist and democratic values has here been replaced by the economic demands of the new global world market.

In recent decades there has been a gradual paradigm shift in the educational agenda from a humanistic discourse, focusing on democracy and personal fulfilment to an instrumental discourse, focusing on economics and global competitiveness. OECD's paradigm became the new meta-narrative during the '80s with a strong appeal to opinion formers, policy makers and businessmen, and it came very much to shape the educational understanding of the EU and its Member States.

In particular, the EU Commission has been the spokesman for a paradigm of lifelong learning, where concepts such as enlightenment, personal autonomy, and sovereignty of the people have become foreign words. The tradition of educational thinkers such as Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus, Comenius, and Grundtvig, who gave names to the EU programme of lifelong learning are silent in the proposals of the Commission.

### Global citizenship

We are thus confronted with an international paradigm shift the last decades in education and culture, which implies that the instrumental rationality in the system world presses the communicative rationality in the life world more and more.

Sixty-four years ago, the nuclear bomb became the symbol of the fact that we had gained enough knowledge to destroy the possibilities of living on the planet. Today, globalization is an expression of the fact that knowledge has tied the world together, and we are confronted with global, common challenges. But the current form of globalization is characterized by a profound asymmetry between the economical and political level. The economy is globalised; goods, services, capital and (virtual) labour can move freely between nations. But we have no global democratic, civic, and cultural institutions, which can match and civilize the global market.

The last decades particular form of globalization comes from the combination of strong market forces and neoliberal governmental politic from above, both seeing the world as one big market place and focusing on man as bourgeois or *homo economicus*, and both are helping the instrumental rationality to colonize the life worlds on a global scale.

But a third player of globalization comes from below, from an emerging global civil society representing a communicative rationality. More and more NGOs have a global perspective on issues such as environment, human rights, social welfare, education and culture. They seek to reframe societies and promote rights and responsibilities that are worldwide in their scope and universal in their principles. During the current financial crises it seems that the *Zeitgeist* is changing towards a more responsible governmental policy from above, especially USAs new president Obama may set standards more in line with the aspirations of the global civil society.

One of the great challenges in the 21st century will be to ensure greater symmetry between the global market forces and the political authorities and the global civil society. UN representing the perspective of global citizenship must and can play a more important role, if the great powers from above and the global civil society from below jointly support this.

### Learning for life

Another major challenge will be to develop a global perspective on education and culture, a perspective of global citizenship.. The main aims of lifelong learning should not only be to promote employability in a market oriented knowledge society, but also to promote personal fulfilment, active citizenship and social and cultural cohesion in a human world.

We need a different view on lifelong learning that maintains the critical perspective on society and the humanistic foundation. As Václav Havel has emphasized: "It is growing ever more evident that what human beings need in order to behave fully sensible on this planet is precisely education, education in the widest sense of the word, education as a lifelong maturation, as a reflexion of the

World and serious thinking about it, as a lifelong journey to wisdom, as opposed to simple learning, cramming or absorption of information.”<sup>1</sup>

We need to revitalize the humanistic paradigm of lifelong learning, which UNESCO as the most important international organisation represents. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century a minor part of mankind gained civil and public human rights, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century these rights were expanded with political democratic rights, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century these rights were supplemented with social welfare rights including rights of culture and education.

But in today’s world most of these rights have only become a reality for a minority of mankind. We need a period of a new humanistic enlightenment, if the 21<sup>st</sup> century shall be the time, when these ideals come through. What the world needs now, is not lifelong learning, but rather learning for life.

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<sup>1</sup> From Havel’s Video Greeting” to the opening of the Nordic-European Academy, Oct. 2005 in Askov, Denmark.