



# Popular Education, Power and Democracy

Edited by Ann-Marie Laginder,  
Henrik Nordvall and Jim Crowther

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Swedish Experiences and Contributions



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## **Acknowledgements**

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This book is an initiative of *Mimer – The Swedish Network for Research on Popular Education*. Mimer, whose secretariat is hosted by Linköping University, is an organisation governed by an interdisciplinary board consisting of leading researchers and popular educators, with the main aim of promoting research on popular education ([www.liu.se/mimer](http://www.liu.se/mimer)). Popular education has become a significant field for educational activities in Sweden – as is portrayed and scrutinised in several of the contributions in this book. Over the years, research related to popular education has grown to become a dynamic field. Studies published in this field of research have, with a few excellent exceptions, been written in Swedish, and thus unfortunately been known only at a national or Nordic level. However, the subjects dealt with in this research are to a great extent universal; they most often deal with the complex struggles of social movements or the many ways in which ordinary people arrange and take part in education on their own premises. In recent years Mimer has decided to strengthen the efforts to break the language barrier which isolates the research debates on these matters from their international counterparts. This is based on the conviction that doing so will benefit not only the Swedish research community, but also make a contribution to scholars and popular educators interested in the Scandinavian tradition of popular education.

We have repeatedly been asked by non-Swedish speaking colleagues and popular education enthusiasts to recommend a comprehensive book in English about Swedish popular education. Frustratingly, we have not

been able to mention any research-based up to date examples. This was the starting point for this anthology, which was initiated by Ann-Marie Laginder, Associate Professor and Director of Mimer, in cooperation with Associate Professor Henrik Nordvall. The title of the book – *Popular Education, Power and Democracy* – emphasises the universal theme which we think is the most urgent one when it comes to communicating insights from research on the rich tradition of Swedish and Scandinavian popular education. Well-known Swedish researchers within the network and prominent international researchers were invited to contribute with different perspectives on this theme.

We soon found out that we needed a coeditor outside Sweden. We were truly pleased when Jim Crowther, Senior Lecturer at Edinburgh University, coordinator of the international Popular Education Network (PEN) accepted the invitation to join us on the editorial group. His critical and constructive contributions to the quality of individual chapters have been crucial. His thorough and extensive experience in editing international anthologies and journals has been of invaluable assistance in the production of the book. Regarding editorial matters we want to thank Pat Brechin, who has done an excellent job in improving the English language in each chapter. We are also grateful for Eleonor Bredlöw's good work in the final checking of references in each chapter.

We want to extend a warm thank you to all the researchers who have contributed to the book. Thank you for all the time and effort you have put into writing these chapters and thus making this book what it is. This unique collection of articles provides a coherent approach to assessing the role of popular education in and beyond Swedish borders and we hope the book will be of interest to academics, students, practitioners and popular education activists worldwide.

*Ann-Marie Laginder and Henrik Nordvall*

## **Notes on contributors**

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**Eva Andersson** is Senior Lecturer at the Department of Education, University of Gothenburg. Since the middle of the 1990s, she has carried out several studies concerning adult education, with the main focus on popular education seen from the perspectives of circle participants, the circle leaders and the local society.

**Sylvia S. Bagley** is PhD, Fritz Burns Endowed Professor in Education at Mount St. Mary's College in Los Angeles, where she is Director of Instructional Leadership. She is coeditor of *Higher Education, Policy, and the Global Competition Phenomenon* (2010), and coauthor of *Community-Based Folk High Schools in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark* (2009).

**Jim Crowther** is Senior Lecturer at the University of Edinburgh. He is coordinator of the international Popular Education Network (PEN), which is a global network of academics and researchers with an interest in promoting popular education research and pedagogy. He is currently the editor of *Studies in the Education of Adults*. His most recent edited books include *More Powerful Literacies* (2012, published by NIACE) and *Learning and Education for a Better World: The Role of Social Movements* (2012, available from Sense Publishers).

**Bernt Gustavsson** is Professor in Education and Democracy, Örebro University. His research and publications have been on popular education, *Bildung*, knowledge and democracy. He has been a guest

professor in South Africa, Norway and in different universities in Sweden. His research projects have been on folk high schools and the utility of popular education.

**Ann-Marie Laginder** is Associate Professor in Education at Linköping University. She has been the Director of Mimer – The Swedish Network for Research on Popular Education – since 1999. She was a member of the Expert Group on national assessments on popular education 2008–2011, appointed by the Swedish National Council of Adult Education. Since 1995 she has conducted several research projects within the field of popular education.

**Berit Larsson** is PhD in gender studies and Senior Lecturer at the Department of Cultural Studies at The University of Gothenburg. She has been working as a teacher on different levels and is one of the founders of the Women's Folk High School (*Kvinnofolkhögskolan*).

**Staffan Larsson** has been Professor at Linköping University, in adult education research, since 1993. He was Chairperson of the Nordic Educational Research Association 2001–2004, a member of the Committee for Educational Research, Swedish Research Council 2007–2009 and chairperson of Mimer 1997–2012. He has done extensive research on adult education and popular education.

**Henrik Nordvall** is Associate Professor in Education at Örebro University and Research Fellow in Adult Education at Linköping University. His research concerns popular education, social movements and political mobilisation. Current projects concern the educational background of the Swedish political elite and the global spread of the Scandinavian folk high school idea.

**Ali Osman** is Associate Professor in Education at Mälardalen University College. Osman's current research interest is the transition from education to work of immigrants and their descendants in Sweden. In the last decade he has published a number of articles and book chapters on Swedish integration practice.

**Alan Rogers** is an adult educator with a long and wide experience of working in many countries, especially in South Asia and Africa. Currently

Special Professor of Adult Education at the University of Nottingham and Visiting Professorial Fellow at the University of East Anglia, his key concerns are with adult learning, training of trainers, adult literacy in the contexts of development and nonformal adult education.

**Kjell Rubenson** had the first chair in Adult Education in Sweden before going to Canada where he is a Professor of Education at the University of British Columbia and codirector of the Centre for Policy Studies in Higher Education and Training. He is the founding president of the European Society for the Study of Education of Adults.

**Val D. Rust** is Professor of Comparative and International Education at the University of California, Los Angeles. He has served for many years as the Director of the UCLA International Education Office and the Director of the UCLA Center for International and Development Education. Among his many publications are *The Democratic Tradition and the Evolution of Schooling in Norway* and *The Unification of German Education*.

**Kerstin Rydbeck** is Professor in Library and Information Science at the Department of ALM (Archive, Library and Museum Studies), Uppsala University. She is also a PhD in Literature and her research mainly focuses on the sociology of literature. Later research has focused upon the history of popular education from a gender perspective.

**Yukiko Sawano** is Professor of Comparative Education and Lifelong Learning at the University of Sacred Heart Tokyo. She is also a board member of the Japan Association of Lifelong Education, Overseas Studies Advisor at the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Technology of Japan and other governmental committees.



# **Key concepts in Swedish popular education:**

## **Translations and explanations**

**Popular education** (*Folkbildning*). In the Swedish context the concept often refers to activities within folk high schools and study associations (see below). In this book we translate Folkbildning as ‘popular education’ to enable us to discuss the phenomenon in a wider international context.

**Decree on government subsidies to popular education, SFS 1991:977** [regular amendment, latest 2011] (*Förordning om statsbidrag till folkbildningen*, SFS 1991:977 [*Förordning om ändring* SFS 1992:737; 1998:973; 2000:1451; 2006:1499; 2011:311]). Conditions for the Swedish government’s grant for folk high schools and study associations are set out in this decree. A fundamental reason for public support of popular education is that it aims to contribute to strengthening democratic development in society. The government subsidy also contributes towards making it possible for people to influence their life situation and create participative involvement in societal development, contribute to levelling educational gaps, raise the level of education and cultural awareness and to broaden the interest for, and increase participation in, cultural life.

**The Swedish National Council of Adult Education** (*Folkbildningsrådet*) is a non-profit-making association with certain authoritative tasks delegated by the government and the Swedish Parliament. The

association has three members: The Interest Organisation for Popular Movement Folk High Schools (RIO) and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR). These two associations represent all folk high schools. The third member is The Swedish Adult Education Association (SAEA) which represents all study associations. The National Council of Adult Education determines who will be granted subsidies in accordance with the government decree of popular education and distributes available funds between the study associations and folk high schools. Any request to start a new folk high school or a new study association is also considered and decided by the National Council of Adult Education.

**Folk high schools** (*Folkhögskolor*). There are currently 150 folk high schools in Sweden. Most folk high schools (107) are owned and operated by social movements, nongovernmental organisations, foundations and local associations. These schools are members of RIO, which represents their common interests. Other folk high schools are owned and operated by regions/counties (42) and municipalities (1). The representative organisation for these folk high schools is SALAR. The folk high schools have courses at various levels with various emphasises. All folk high schools offer general courses, which can qualify students for university studies. The folk high schools also offer many specialist courses, often linked to the profile of the school. Some of these specialist courses are vocational. The folk high schools' profile can be based on the owners' ideologies but also based on for example a specific content such as music or arts and crafts. The long-term courses last from one to three years, but the folk high schools also offer short courses of less than 15 days.

**Study associations** (*Studieförbund*). There are currently ten study associations in Sweden. Each one reflects the interests and concerns of the social movements and nongovernmental organisations that are members of the associations. In total, the 10 study associations have more than 372 member or cooperating organisations at national level. The study circle is the most characteristic form of activity for the study associations. Cultural programmes of various kinds comprise the other major form of activities.

## PART I

# Setting the scene



## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

*Ann-Marie Laginder, Henrik Nordvall and Jim Crowther*

Worldwide, we can find multiple traditions of popular education; i.e. education which is not just making knowledge accessible to people at the grassroots, but is also designed by the values, perspectives and interests of the people (Flowers, 2009). This book addresses one specific tradition of this kind of education, namely the Scandinavian one, and more precisely the version developed in Sweden. Our ambition is to mirror this tradition, which has spread and inspired popular educators far beyond its Scandinavian origins, through the lens of the contributions of a wide range of international scholars. Emerging from the struggle of social movements in the late 1900s and early 2000s popular education in Sweden has developed into a large publicly supported sector of educational practices, such as study circles and folk high schools, with a unique level of participation. Due to its contemporary character of a mass phenomenon, with a specific history of movement mobilisation and state integration, Sweden, we argue, offers a generative starting point for examining the role of popular education in relation to power and democracy – which is the general theme of this book.

Both the idea of making knowledge accessible to the people, as well as the idea that education should be organised and defined by the needs and interests of the people – as organised movements or as small groups of individuals – rest on democratic ideals of various kind. Popular education is also inevitably related to power struggles of different types. It could be the struggle of a political movement to change the social order or the struggle of the individual to create a space free from

the demands of working life or domestic obligations. By acquiring knowledge, individuals and groups enhance their ability to assert their interests – in society in general and everyday life in particular.

From a societal perspective, popular education can be interpreted as alternative public arenas where social, political or cultural groups assert and examine their claims to truth and knowledge. But when organising alternative arenas, and transforming some power relations, others may remain and new ones occur. Popular education activities that undermine class hierarchies, might very well reproduce gender hierarchies or hierarchies of ‘race’ (and vice versa). That is why this book also deals with the power structures within popular education and thus critically examines where the democratic ideals fail.

Popular education in Sweden has been integral to the development of a wide array of social movements and the development of study associations to formulate, disseminate and inform their causes. It has been a force for mobilising change ‘from below’ as well as being vital to the development of learning opportunities for adults in pursuit of a wide range of interests, knowledge and skills. The emergence of folk high schools in Sweden, from the nineteenth century onwards, pioneered the growth of a broad and rich curriculum of courses and public lectures linking learning and life. Moreover, the pedagogy of study circles created democratic approaches to knowledge construction and learning that have been characteristic of the adult learning experience in Swedish popular education.

However, popular education in Sweden should not be reduced to an expression of the mobilisation of social movements. As Kjell Rubenson demonstrates in his chapter, where he sets the European policy scene for this book, Swedish popular education is characterised both by its extensive nature and its dependence on institutions located in the intersection between the state and social movements. A substantial part of the Swedish population participates in popular education activities organised by state-subsidised study associations and folk high schools. Most of them participate out of personal motives rather than political ones. Popular education, thus, is a highly state integrated phenomenon and a mainstream activity in Swedish society.

## **Context: the Swedish model and its transition**

To understand the close relationship between Swedish popular education and the state, as well as its mainstream character, one has to consider the historical background. Sweden does have a long tradition of cooperation between the state and popular movements, which typifies the Swedish version of the so-called corporate state (Rothstein, 1992).

The social democratic labour movement has had significant importance for the development of Swedish society. The tradition of popular education developed in close relation to this movement and when it gained political power over the state it contributed to the further development of a state-subsidised sector of popular education. However, the connection to the popular education tradition was far from unique to the labour movement. Other movements, such as the free churches and the peasant movement, which was the forerunner of the contemporary Swedish Centre Party (centre-liberals), are as linked to the Swedish popular education tradition as the labour movement (Arvidson, 1985).

Sweden is often associated with the image of a Social Democratic mixed economy, a middle way between socialism and capitalism, which was often how it was conveyed until the 1980s. This image of the 'Swedish model' still appears from time to time, although to some extent this could be seen both as an expression of nostalgia and the result of widespread mythology (Andersson, 2009). In international political debates, Sweden has been depicted as both a utopia, by people in the political left, as well as a dystopia by the political right, as when the US Fox News host Bill O'Reilly accused the president Barack Obama of trying to 'change America into Sweden' (Eaves, 2012). Although considerable elements of the Swedish model, characterised by an extensive tax-funded welfare state, still exist, significant changes have occurred in recent decades. At the end of the 1980s, when, for instance, Stephen Ball and Staffan Larsson (1989) made a map of the Swedish social and educational landscape, the Swedish welfare model was based on circumstances where the unemployment rate was very low, and had not exceeded 4 per cent since the end of the 1940s. Another central condition indicated at this time was the stable political situation, where the social democrats, since 1932, had never got less than 40 per cent in the national election results, and had been in government since then<sup>1</sup>,

apart from a period in 1976–1982 when they were in opposition (Ball and Larsson, 1989). The next decade was undeniably a time of upheaval and rapid change regarding both of these conditions. Between 1990 and 1993, unemployment increased from 1.4 per cent to 9 per cent (Freeman, Swedenborg and Topel, 2010, p. 1). In the 1991 election, Sweden elected a centre-right government. The Social Democrats regained power in 1994 and kept it until 2006, when the present centre-right government regained power.

Another feature of the Swedish context in the 1980s, along with low unemployment and the social democratic dominance outlined by Ball and Larsson (1989), was its far-reaching equality, as illustrated by the Swedish Gini coefficient<sup>2</sup> that around 1980 was 0.205, compared to the UK at 0.273 and 0.326 in the United States at that time. The lower the ratio the greater the degree of equality so that zero would measure total equality. Although Sweden in an international perspective is still characterised by relatively small differences in income, inequality has increased. In 2010, the Gini coefficient in Sweden was 0.325 (Statistics Sweden, 2012). However, inequality in the United States and the United Kingdom has increased even more since 1980 and is today above 0.400 in both countries (Poverty site, 2012; U. S. Census Bureau, 2012).

The quite radical changes in Swedish society should, as Göran Therborn (2012) summarises it, be understood from the background of the deep economic crisis in Sweden during the 1990s, which also forced the Social Democrats to ‘shift historical gear’. They prioritised fiscal consolidation and promotion of competitiveness on the world market over full employment and social rights.

*However, along the way, classical Social Democratic goals of employment and entitlements were pushed aside by a new liberal worldview, which privatized telecommunications and imported Thatcherite public market management first on the Continent. This in turn laid the basis after 2006 for the ongoing, bourgeois privatization of social services, transforming them from a civic right to a costumer purchase. Sweden has indeed become a trailblazer of turning public services into sources of private profit, guaranteed by taxpayers' money. Even the UK's aggressive Cameron government is still hesitating before turning schools into profit centers, but in Sweden this is now so established that private schooling, like health and social*

*care, has already left its competitive phase to enter into an oligopolistic system of chain profiteers. (Therborn, 2012, p. 284)*

Beyond dispute, a lot about the ‘Swedish model’ has changed. However, vital parts of the welfare state still remain. Popular education, as a state-funded system with broad popular participation, is a clear example of this. A broad political consensus on the importance of popular education has meant that the centre-right governments of Sweden (1991–1994 and from 2006 to present) have also continued to support this sector. For instance, the government bill on popular education that was developed and written by a Social Democratic government in 2006 came to be implemented by the centre-right government that took office in the autumn of that year. This can partly be understood on the basis that even among several of the bourgeois parties there is a strong popular movement tradition, where study circles and folk high schools have historically been important parts of the parties’ cultures. Thus, popular education as a contemporary sector in Sweden is found to be attractive from various political perspectives. For example, it contains both spaces for social movements to challenge neoliberal politics, as well as opening up the kind of voluntary, civil society based welfare actors that neoliberals see as attractive alternatives to general and publicly organised institutions.

To summarise, Swedish popular education cannot solely be understood as a Social Democratic phenomenon, but something that has a much broader political support, which has enabled a comprehensive, and over time relatively stable, public funding.

### Perspectives on popular education

When writing about Swedish popular education in this book, it is relevant to state that this also refers to a more general Scandinavian tradition of popular education. The folk high schools were first established in Denmark for instance and the Danish theologian Grundtvig is often referred to. Even the Swedish origin of the study circle could be questioned. The study circle was initiated by Oscar Olsson (1877–1950), who is celebrated as ‘the father of the study circles’. Olsson was a member of the labour movement as well as a member of the temperance movement. Another member of the temperance movement, Edvard Wavrinsky (1848–1924), has also been put forward as the person who introduced the idea into Sweden, while Oscar Olsson’s contribution

was to popularise the idea. Either way, both of them visited the US in 1893 and were inspired by the study circles promoted by the Chataqua Literary and Scientific Society (Arvidson, 1985; Steele, 2007).

Both in Swedish history and in contemporary times popular education is a heterogeneous tradition where conflicting social, political and religious convictions coexist. As well as the various perspectives among popular educators there are various perspectives among scholars who have studied the tradition and history of popular education in Sweden. Drawing on a number of theoretical perspectives and empirical foci the contributors in this book offer different interpretations of what characterises the historical and contemporary nature of popular education in Sweden. Making the complexity of the phenomenon of popular education visible contributes to the strength and value of the book. It makes it explicit that there are alternative histories depending on the chosen point of view. This development, which from one perspective could be described as a success for democracy and equality, could from another perspective be seen as a process of marginalisation of women or as an expression of subtle racism. Our ambition is that this book will give as accurate and empirically grounded a picture of Swedish popular education as possible at the present time but will also give an outlook on international perspectives and comparisons. By introducing both research on popular education in Sweden, and international research on globally disseminated ideas, our aim is to contribute to the development of literature on popular education.

## **The structure of the book**

The book contains four main parts. After this introduction as part I of Setting the Scene the following chapter by Kjell Rubenson (chapter 2), examines the Swedish tradition of popular education in the context of the European Commission's (EU) adult and lifelong learning discourse. Rubenson discusses what lessons can be drawn for the realisation of the European Union's strategy on lifelong learning for all. If the growing references in EU policy documents to the humanistic and democratic role of adult and lifelong learning are serious, experience from Swedish popular education should be reflected on by policymakers striving for evidence-based reforms, Rubenson argues.

Part II of the book introduces historical perspectives on popular education, beginning with chapter 3 by Bernt Gustavsson who high-

lights the transformations of the concept of *bildung*\* both in space and time and develops an argument for its continued relevance in the context of globalisation today. Beginning with the roots of the concept in German culture, and thinkers such as Gottfried Herder, Immanuel Kant, Vilhelm von Humboldt and other philosophers and writers in the neohumanistic tradition, Gustavsson demonstrates the characteristics of the Nordic and Swedish tradition and how the transformations of *bildung* occurred.

In chapter 4 Kerstin Rydbeck elucidates why women's organisations have largely remained outside the organisational structure that grew up around popular education in Sweden in the twentieth century. She demonstrates how the established study associations looked upon women's educational work in general and how they regarded the educational activities run within women's organisations. Rydbeck argues that in contrast to the class perspective, which always has been the self-evident point of departure for discussions of the concept of popular education, the gender perspective is still often neglected.

In chapter 5, Staffan Larsson illuminates the history of the Swedish folk high schools by presenting a thesis about how the tempo of change and the mechanisms behind it in school reforms relate to the general social and educational development in society. Larsson argues that the folk high schools have been innovative, not only in themselves, but also in relation to the Swedish education system generally. Primary and secondary schools have often had a role in receiving or taking over what have been innovations developed in folk high schools in the first instance. Thus the folk high school has been an avant-garde in education.

In part III of the book the relation between power and popular education is dealt with from various perspectives. In chapter 6, Eva Andersson and Ann-Marie Laginder, drawing on their extensive qualitative and quantitative research on study circles over the years, discuss how these educational practices can be understood in relation to power. The point of departure in this chapter is the micro level, i.e. the motives, interests and experiences of people who participate in study circles in contemporary Sweden. Andersson and Laginder examine what experiences of inclusion and influence on society the

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\* italicisation of non-English words at every occurrence would be intrusive and distracting. As a general rule, a non-English word will be italicised on its first appearance in a chapter, and thereafter not.

participants articulate and in what ways the study circles contribute to the participants' ability to take power over their lives.

In chapter 7, Henrik Nordvall presents an in-depth study of the interaction between activists in the global justice movement and the Swedish popular education sector. Inspired by a neo-Gramscian theoretical framework Nordvall examines the emergence of local social forums (inspired by the World Social Forum) in Sweden and their relation to parts of the state-subsidised educational sector, particularly the Workers' Educational Association. Both the production of coalitions that might strengthen the counter-hegemonic capacity of the social forums, and the pitfalls of cooption, which might neutralise their counter-hegemonic potential, are examined.

In chapter 8, Ali Osman examines how popular education in Sweden conceptualises its function and role in facilitating the social inclusion of immigrants. By applying theoretical insights from postcolonial and antiracist theory Osman delineates and problematises how the institutions of popular education cooperate with immigrant associations and how they consider the exclusion of migrants. Osman makes critical points about tendencies within Swedish popular education towards producing a discourse in which immigrants are constructed as enslaved by primordial and backward cultures, which are incompatible with a modern, democratic and liberal Swedish society. As a consequence popular education is constructed as something that will 'liberate' the Others and include them in the existing democratic structure.

In chapter 9, Berit Larsson presents reflections based on her work and experience as a teacher in Sweden's only folk high school for adult women, the Women's Folk High School (*Kvinnofolkhögskolan*) in Gothenburg, in which a wide variety of women from different backgrounds come into contact with each other. Drawing on a range of theoretical insights, Larsson argues for the need of agonistic dialogue in such a diversified context, and that an agonistic feminism can be reconciled with a politically radical concept of popular education.

Part IV of the book, in which we turn beyond the Swedish context, begins with chapter 10 by Sylvia S. Bagley and Val D. Rust who investigate how the Scandinavian model of 'folk high schools' (labelled 'folk schools' in North America), has spread and developed in the United States. The authors present research on the handful of existing folk schools in the United States, describing their origins, their debt to the original Scandinavian model of folk high schools and their

current missions. They locate the folk schools in a broader spectrum of adult education opportunities in the United States and argue that the modern Scandinavian folk high school model remains an under-utilised inspiration for the adult education sector in the United States.

In chapter 11, Alan Rogers explores the folk development colleges in Tanzania, which are based explicitly on the model of the Scandinavian folk high schools. They were created during the 1970s as a result of interaction between President Nyerere of Tanzania and Sweden, when Sweden gave both technical and economical support. Thus, this chapter provides a case study in the interaction between two distinct cultures, over a lengthy period, providing an opportunity to study international transfers of educational ideas and especially issues of rhetoric, implementation and cultural imposition. In this chapter, both the development of these institutions, as well as an up-to-date picture of their present status, are presented and critically discussed. If further assistance to the Tanzanian schools is given, Rogers argue, it is crucial that it is done in a way that will promote their differences and does not seek to make them into a replica of the Scandinavian model.

In chapter 12, Yukiko Sawano reviews research on Scandinavian popular education in Japan since the early twentieth century and discusses how the introduction of the concept has influenced nonformal education practice in Japan at different stages. The Scandinavian model of education has been viewed as an ideal in Japan for a long time. However, it was only at the end of the twentieth century, Sawano argues, that it was possible to implement the Scandinavian model of popular education from the bottom up, by the citizens themselves in Japan. According to the author, popular education, compared to formal education, holds a potential to be more cross-national or cross-cultural, because of its nonformality and flexibility, especially when citizens can act on their own initiative, free from any political or ideological influence.

In the final chapter of the book, Jim Crowther addresses the relationship between popular education and the state, where he relates the Swedish experiences to the contemporary situation in UK. The state, Crowther argues, is an important instrument for providing resources, rights and opportunities which individuals and communities need and these should be defended and extended where necessary. At the same time, the state reproduces social relations of domination and control which popular education should equip people to make visible and challenge. In the context of globalisation, moreover, the traditional

territorial state is no longer the main source of oppressive power. Popular educators therefore need to help communities of struggle and endurance to make connections and act globally as well as nationally and locally.

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### Notes

- 1 Except from the summer of 1936 where the social democratic government resigned, during the vacation, three months before the election and let the opposition run in a more or less closed public office.
- 2 In short the Gini coefficient measures the level of inequality in society on a scale where 1 = the situation where one single person receives 100 per cent of the total income and the remaining people receive none, and 0 = a situation where every person receives the same income.

## CHAPTER TWO

# Towards lifelong learning for *all* in Europe: Understanding the fundamental role popular education could play in the European Commission's strategy

*Kjell Rubenson*

## Introduction

This chapter examines the Swedish tradition of popular education in the context of the European Commission's adult and lifelong learning discourse and discusses what lessons can be drawn for the realisation of the European Union's strategy on lifelong learning for all. The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (*Europe 2020*) notes, 'it is vital that better empirical evidence is available to underpin reforms' (EC, 2011a, p. 3). Similarly, the 2006 *Communication on Adult Learning* stressed that 'reliable data are required to develop evidence-based policies for reforms' (EC, 2006, p. 9). However, as Huw *et al.* (2000) astutely observe, most of those promoting evidence-based policy are well aware of the chaotic and political process of policy making and would admit that the term 'evidence-based' is an overstatement of the rational use of research evidence in the policy process; 'Many would argue that evidence-influenced or even evidence-aware is the best we can hope for.' (*ibid.*, p. 11). Thus, while recognising that policymaking should generally be understood as a process of argumentation (Levin, 2009),

internationally benchmarking policy outcomes can offer important ‘ammunition’ for such argumentation. It is from this perspective that I will discuss how an analysis of comparative data on participation in adult learning, in combination with an exploration of the characteristics of popular education, could inform EU policies on lifelong learning. The analysis starts with a brief review of recent EU policies on adult and lifelong learning.

## **European Commission policies on adult and lifelong learning**

The EU’s philosophy on lifelong learning for all, as outlined in the *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (EC, 2000), has been heralded as a key component of the Lisbon agenda and a centrepiece in the political project to reshape the relationship between the economy and education (see, e.g., Tuschling and Engelmann, 2006). The overarching goal of the Lisbon agenda is to establish the EU as the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world while sustaining economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. Reflecting this idea within what is loosely understood as the European social model, the *Memorandum* emphasises that there are two equally important aims for lifelong learning: promoting active citizenship and promoting employability. The document states (EC, 2000, p. 4):

*The European Union must set an example for the world and show that it is possible both to achieve dynamic economic growth and to strengthen social cohesion. Lifelong learning is an essential policy for the development of citizenship, social cohesion and employment.*

Despite the reference to development of citizenship and social cohesion in the *Memorandum*, it must be stressed that economic consideration has remained the major driving force for the EU’s work on lifelong learning (Borg and Mayo, 2005). In fact, it is doubtful how central the noneconomic goals were at the time of the Lisbon declaration. According to Wickham (2002, p. 1), the Portuguese presidency had a very difficult time getting the words ‘social inclusion’ included in the declaration. The word citizenship does not appear in the declaration, though it is mentioned in the *Memorandum*.

During the last five years the issues of citizenship, democracy and

social cohesion have increasingly taken on a new urgency in EC policy documents. The 2006 progress report on the programme *Education and Training 2010*, titled *Modernising Education and Training: a vital contribution to prosperity and social cohesion in Europe*, states that the dual role – of social and economic education – needs to be reaffirmed (EC, 2006, p. 2). Further, it is noted that lifelong learning has to become a concrete reality. This would involve ‘the creation of learning environments that are open, attractive and accessible to everyone, especially to disadvantaged groups’ (*ibid.*, p. 5).

In this context it is important to note that the EU’s overarching strategy *Europe 2020*, in contrast to earlier declarations, provides a headline target on social inclusion and poverty reduction (EC, 2011a). In this spirit, a key priority in the *New Strategic Framework of European Cooperation in Education and Training* is the promotion of democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue (*ibid.*, p. 50). It is noted that adult learning policies should pay more attention not only to the need of skill upgrading but also linguistic, social and cultural learning (*ibid.*, p. 57). In this context the report notes:

*Adult learning provides access to the competences that all adults and communities need for the growth of social awareness and proactive engagement in the community. Participation in adult learning enables communities and individuals to design new roles and structures for an inclusive society with high degree of active citizenship and shared values to promote the development of social capital and social cohesion. Indeed, participation in adult learning may be considered a form of social inclusion itself.*

In the context of the renewed emphasis on the social dimension of education and training, the EU’s policy documents recognise that:

*Adult learning offered in a variety of environments, involving multiple stakeholders (including public and private sectors, higher education institutions, local communities and NGOs) and covering learning for personal civic, social and employment-related purposes, is central to reaching disadvantaged and at-risk groups. (EC, 2010, p. c 135/5)*

With adult learning being promoted as a key response to the economic

as well as social challenges facing the EU, participation – or rather the nonparticipation – in lifelong learning is once again at the forefront of the policy discussions. A European Commission Staff working paper *Action Plan on Adult Learning: Achievements and Results 2008–2010*. (EC, 2011b) reports that access to and participation in adult learning is, for many, not yet a reality. In fact, the data since 2005 suggests that there has been a slight annual decrease in overall EU participation (*ibid.*, p. 5). The conclusion is that ‘While most countries have adopted a lifelong learning strategy or are using lifelong learning as their guiding principle implementing learning over life course is a greater challenge and many countries are grappling with this.’ (*ibid.*, p. 19).

From this brief overview of recent EU policies two things stand out. First, the EU is faced with the challenge of expanding participation in adult learning. Second, in addition to the economic goal that has dominated the policies on adult and lifelong learning, there is a growing realisation that more attention needs to be given to how adult and lifelong learning can contribute to democratisation and individual fulfilment. In the following two sections I will attempt to argue that a system of publicly financed popular education can be part of a strategy to address these two challenges. However, first the discussion will focus on the characteristics of popular education.

## **Distinctive features of the Swedish popular education tradition**

Olof Palme, speaking of democratic traditions, labelled Sweden a ‘study circle democracy’ (Bjerkaker, 2006). In this perspective it is of interest to pose questions like ‘wherein lies the distinctive character of Swedish popular education?’ And ‘how can a phenomenon that was so closely integrated with the evolution of the grand social movements that began to emerge at the end of the nineteenth century still play a central role in today’s version of the Swedish welfare state?’ In an attempt to answer these questions, I will in this section focus on popular education as institutions and later in the chapter return to the effect of the institutional conditions on the teaching and learning processes of popular education.

## **Popular education as institution**

‘The history of adult education may be written as an account of the founding, growth, development, and demise of institutions which have served special interests.’ (Griffith, 1970, p. 172.) Thus, the discussion will begin by addressing popular education as an institution and how the state justifies its involvement in these institutions. This is but one possible way of approaching the topic and Swedish scholars have given considerable attention, from essential as well as discursive perspectives, to how we can understand the distinctive features of popular education and how these might differ from other forms of education (for an extensive review see Andersén, Lundin and Sundgren, 2003).

From an institutional perspective, it is of interest to note that to the question ‘What is popular education?’ it is most likely that the Swedish layperson would answer ‘study associations and folk high schools’. That is to say the respondent would define the concept in terms of institutions. This is also the point of departure for The Swedish National Council of Adult Education (*Folkbildningssrådet*), a nonprofit organisation with the parliamentary authority to distribute government grants to study associations and folk high schools (Folkbildningsrådet, 2011, p. 2): ‘When the Swedish term popular education is used in this text, it refers to the folk high schools and the study associations.’ From modest beginnings these institutions have grown to become an extensive and well-established part of Swedish culture and education. The nine study associations arranged 279,100 adult education classes with 1.8 million participants in 2010, 62,000 other group study activities reached 732,000 people and 314,000 cultural events were attended by 16.4 million spectators. It should be noted that a person could participate in more than one study circle or cultural event. In the same year, the 150 folk high schools had 56,000 participants in their long courses (over 15 days), 113,000 enrolled in short courses and 23,000 people attended their cultural events. These figures illustrate part of what is special about Swedish popular education: the extensive nature of the activity and its clear institutionalisation.

What stands out about these adult learning institutions is their location at the intersection between civil society with its social movements and the state. According to the contract between popular education and the state, popular education shall be free, voluntary and self-governing. This principle is strongly reiterated in the most recent bill regulating

popular education (Proposition 2005/06:192). This freedom is of central importance to understanding the role of popular education in today's Swedish society. In accordance with the notion of free and voluntary adult education, the Bill stresses that it is up to the popular education organisations to identify the relevant target groups. However, the freedom is not absolute but is set within the parameters given by the *Riksdag* (Swedish Parliament).

In the popular education Bill 2005/06:192: *Learn, Grow, Change*, the Riksdag notes that the state's financial support to popular education is based on the understanding that popular education is of fundamental advantage to society. It contributes to democracy by giving people increased power over their own lives, constitutes a meeting place for people, acts as an arena for discussions around the main challenges facing society and is a cornerstone of the Swedish social movement tradition. Popular education contributes to the realisation of lifelong learning for all, and finally, it strengthens personal development. Accordingly, the Riksdag states (Proposition 2005/06:192) that the aim of the State's grants to popular education should be to support activities that contribute to:

- strengthening and developing democracy,
- making it possible for people to influence their life situation and creating participative involvement in societal development,
- reducing educational gaps and raising the level of education and cultural awareness in society, and
- creating interest and broadening participation in cultural life.

The integration into the state apparatus has produced what can be seen as a fundamental contradiction in Swedish popular education; an activity whose charter is 'free and voluntary' but which, for its very existence, depends on state subsidy. Originally, Swedish social movements, located in civil society, stood in direct opposition to the state but, over time, gradually became closely integrated into the State. Swedish popular movements chose a strategy diametrically opposed to what characterises new social movements, for example, by adopting strong centralised organisations struggling to achieve as much political power as possible. Similarly, Swedish popular movements built a large-scale system, mainly of study associations, offering popular education in the form of study circles. From primarily having been a resource for the movement's own

members and closely integrated into the general activities function, study associations came to serve two masters, being a resource for the movement and an instrument for the state. Before the introduction of the new state subsidy in 1947, The Workers Adult Education Association (ABF), which up until today is closely integrated into the labour movement, directed all activities to its member organisations. However, within a couple of years of the 1947 reform, at least half of all study circles were directed towards the general population (Svensson, 1996). One outcome of this broadening of the target group has been a sharp increase in participation rates.

## **Popular education and adult and lifelong learning for all**

While EU policy documents use international surveys on participation to identify that there is a problem with participation, the EU, like other supranational organisations, for example, the OECD (see, e.g., OECD, 2003; OECD, 2005), fails in part to engage in any serious analysis of the comparative data. This hampers their ability to identify key factors that might help understand the major national differences. However, the comparative data on participation contain some lessons on the role that a viable system of popular education can play.

The International Adult Literacy Survey, the Adult Life Skills and Literacy Survey, the Eurobarometer and the European Adult Education Survey provide comparative data on participation in adult learning. The findings vary somewhat between different surveys (see, e.g., OECD, 2005), but the key findings are fairly consistent across surveys. Looking at participation, three findings stand out. First, the data reveals the existence of large national differences in participation rates. Sweden, together with the other Nordic countries, is among a small group of countries with overall participation rates that are consistently close to, or exceed, 50 per cent. The next group of countries includes those of Anglo-Saxon origin and a few of the smaller Northern European countries with rates in the 35 to 50 per cent range. Thereafter are countries that report a rate of between 20 and 35 per cent; and, finally, there is a group of countries with overall participation rates in adult learning consistently below 20 per cent. It is not surprising that there are major differences between countries that are at different stages in the modernisation process. However, the variations among highly

industrialised nations point to differences in history, educational structures and policies.

Second, while there are major inequalities in participation in all countries it is important to note that the level of inequality differs markedly between countries. Regardless of country, the higher a person's level of education the more likely she/he is to participate, but this relationship is considerably stronger in some countries than in others. The smallest differences are found in Sweden and the other Nordic countries where there is a sizable rate of participation also among those with rather restricted initial education. Thus, the data suggests that while the influence of family and initial schooling will always be present, public policy can somewhat reduce their impact on readiness to participate in adult education and training. Similarly, regardless of country, participation decreases with age. However, it is important to note that while this is the general pattern, there are thought-provoking national differences. In contrast to the situation in most countries, in Sweden and the other Nordic countries older adults, 56–65 years of age, have relatively high participation, although still substantially lower than the younger cohorts.

Third, an analysis of the relationship between barriers and participation using the Eurobarometer data suggests that while adults in Nordic and non-Nordic countries experience barriers to participation to more or less the same extent, the former are more likely to participate (Rubenson and Desjardins, 2009).

The favourable participation pattern in adult education in Sweden should be understood in the context of its prevailing welfare state regime and its impact on the funding regime, industrial relations and, more broadly, opportunity structures (*ibid*). In the context of this chapter I want to draw special attention to the institutional structure and the broad learning opportunities that this affords groups that traditionally do not seek adult education. In contrast to the situation in most other countries, there exists in Sweden a large publicly supported sector of popular education. Through the existence of a publicly supported popular education, individuals in Sweden have access to a form of adult education that can respond to different aspirations and needs from the formal educational system or the education and training supplied by employers. A longitudinal study of participation in adult education in Sweden supports this line of reasoning (see Rubenson, 1996). This study showed that the age, educational and ethnic differences between participants and

non-participants were substantially less for popular education than for employer-sponsored education and training or participation in formal adult education courses and programmes. In addition to offering a varied programme that can be tailored to different groups' and individuals' interests and challenges, the study associations' link to various social movements provides rich opportunities for active recruitment through outreach activities. The Swedish findings, in combination with the international comparisons, suggest that in the perspective of the *New Strategic Framework of European Cooperation in Education and Training*, it might be worthwhile to look closer at Swedish popular education; not only as a way of creating a learning environment that is attractive and accessible to disadvantaged groups, but also for the fact that the educative processes may contribute to calls in the EC policy documents for forms of adult education that will equip citizens with the competencies and virtues that will help them in the struggle to improve democracy, enrich civil society and contribute to growing social cohesion.

## **Popular education as method and the EU's educational goals**

It is often stressed that the distinctive character of popular education primarily lies in the pedagogy and methodology (Bjerkaker, 2006). Consequently it is of interest to look at popular education in the context of the European Commission's growing concern regarding the quality of adult learning (see, e.g., EC, 2010; 2011a). In *It is never too late to learn* (EC, 2006) the member states are strongly encouraged to address the issue of quality in adult education. This is reiterated in *Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training 2020*, where quality is listed as the second strategic objective and a key issue in the coming decade (EC, 2011a). The report notes that improving quality is central in the work to ensure that all citizens acquire the key competencies. The report asks for the establishment of an inventory on good practice to help clarify what works and why. It further notes (*ibid.*, p. 7) that in practice, quality in education is discussed with regard to three components:

- Quality of structure, which focuses on organisation and resource issues;
- Quality of process, which focuses on internal activities such as teaching and learning;

- Quality of results, which focuses on the outcomes of the learning activities.

According to the International Conference on Adult Education's (CONFINTEA VI) *Global Report*, relevance is the most important dimension of quality in adult education and training. The report stresses that the provision should support personal and social change, sustain motivation to participate and support persistence in learning. This way of expressing quality goes beyond the frequent calls in policy documents for the introduction of assurance systems, regulations, professional development or accreditation of providers by drawing attention to the very nature of what is being offered and how it is being offered (UNESCO, 2009). Instead of quality through regulation regimes, it is quality through process and content that comes to the foreground, something most often ignored in the EC policy discussions on the quality of adult and lifelong learning. However, recent EC documents encourage member states to invest in teaching methods and materials adapted to the needs of adults, and to learn through discussions of best practice. In this spirit the following discussion will focus on popular education as best practice in the context of relevance, as defined by CONFINTEA VI.

The study circle, the dominant form of popular education, is most often organised under the auspices of one of the ten official study associations. It would typically have five to ten participants and the circle would meet regularly once a week, for two or three hours at a time, for eight to ten consecutive weeks during a season. According to governmental policy documents (see, e.g., Proposition 2005/06:192) as well as mission statements from study associations and folk high schools, the activities should be organised in such ways that the participants would have considerable opportunities to influence the content of the activities and the activities of the study circle ought to build upon the joint work of the participants. The working methods should be such that they provide real practice in democratic thinking and action, and an important aspect is collective activities toward a collective goal. Tests, grades and individual achievement ratings are therefore considered inappropriate and are not to be allowed in the study circle. The traditional role of the teacher – that is to say where the teacher teaches and the participants are passive receivers – has no place in the circle. Discussions are considered key to the circle's work. The discussion is

considered to contribute to the exchange of knowledge and experience, and to provide training in decision making. The participants are to be encouraged to broaden their views and to develop an understanding not only of the specifics but to reach insights far beyond the topic under study. We must, however, distinguish between idea and practice, as the title of Jan Byström's now classical study, *All Study Circles do not become Study Circles* (Byström, 1976) indicates. What this study showed was that at times the study circle seemed to have more in common with traditional schooling than the ideals of popular education.

The methodological ethos of popular education has some similarities to the Knowles (1970) andragogical ideals that, despite constant criticism of its shortcoming, tend to have a major impact on the discussions in adult education circles. However, there is a fundamental difference between the two concepts. In the 1989 *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education*, Boucouvalas and Krupp (1989, p. 183) state: 'The terms adult and adulthood form a pivotal axis upon which adult education revolves as a field both of study and practice.' It is this view that has been the basis for the andragogic theses. Despite repeated criticism against its empirical base and the concept's validity, the perspective sums up the overwhelmingly dominant view in adult education literature and has been decisive for recommendations involving methods and work procedures. The primary aim of adult education is, according to the andragogic view, to develop the adult's capacity to be in control of their life – 'self-directedness' (Brookfield, 1989). This is a differential psychological perspective linked to a general humanistic tradition that has dominated North American adult education and is the basis for the andragogic position. The andragogic perspective assumes that the participants are independent, and possess experiences that are of great value to the teaching. A person's preparedness to learn is tied to their actual life situation and the skills developed are expected to have a transformational effect relatively immediately. Teaching is problem oriented and not subject oriented. The participants (students) are expected to have a great deal of influence over direction, choice of content, work methods and forms of evaluation. The pedagogical and methodological view of popular education contains, in and of itself, the andragogic ideals but it also differs, particularly with regard to one fundamental aspect. Thus, while the andragogic tradition wholly originates in and focuses on the individual, the methodology of popular education also takes into consideration the collective. In the

context of study circles this is expressed in terms of ‘collective inquiry’ as well ‘as collective work toward a collective goal’. It should therefore not be sufficient that participants merely take part in planning and decisions, which fulfil the andragogic ideal. Further, popular education is more explicit about, and gives more attention to, the development of instructional methods, including discussions that can provide practical training in democracy.

It is important to stress that the characteristic of popular education as an institution is central not only in the perspective of state–civil, society–individual, as discussed in the previous section, but also in understanding the pedagogic character of popular education. A weakness of the andragogic position is that the relationship between institutional context and activity is entirely ignored. It is assumed that the andragogical principles can be applied to the education of adults regarding institutional context and all that is involved with that. In the andragogical literature, the philosophy is based on two key assumptions. First, as the participants are adults they are expected to possess certain characteristics. The second assumption is that the adult instructor, if trained appropriately, will be ready and able to follow the andragogical principles regardless of context. However, as Ellström, Davidsson and Rönnqvist (1990) point out, pedagogic activities should be seen in relation to external and internal contexts. The former is of two types: a) the political-administrative system to which the organisation belongs and b) the organisation’s relation to the surrounding society. Internal context is divided into structural and ideological-cultural subcontexts. These are consequences of political or administrative decisions that are meant to limit, regulate or steer a certain education. Lundgren (1977) distinguishes between three main categories of framework factors: economic-administrative frameworks (locales, equipment, the structure of positions, etc.), legal frameworks (constitutions, regulations, instructions, etc.) and ideological frameworks (goals, policy documents, course outlines, etc.). With the ideological-cultural subcontexts these authors have in mind a world of ideas of the organisation. This includes perceptions, thought patterns, values and traditions, which are assumed to give direction to the individual’s comprehension of what is the natural, possible and desired pattern for the activity. Thus, when engaging with the European Commission’s discussion of quality in adult education, it is important to remember that it is the specific frame factors governing popular education that shape the educational activities.

In looking at how the institutional context of popular education affects the study circle, it is of interest to refer to Larsson (2001) who, when discussing the pedagogy of study circles, draws an interesting distinction to what Tyack and Tobin (1994) have labelled the common ‘grammar of schooling’ – a general structure that all school systems have in common. According to the authors, the central dimensions in this grammar include: specific choice of content; compartmentalisation and fragmentation of knowledge; homework; and time that is broken down into modules called lessons. Larsson notes that this grammar reflects an instrumental rationality of knowledge. However, he claims that in the case of study circles the system world, with its credentialism and links to the hierarchical work structure, is less visible and should, in terms of Habermas’ theory on communicative action (Habermas, 1991), be understood to be more regulated by communicative rationality. Communication action can be seen as a process of argumentation through which the participants support their position before an audience (Habermas, 1996, p. 323). Drawing on Habermas, Crowther and Martin (2011, p. 267) note, ‘Democratic deliberation is essentially about communication, and how we use language to communicate with each other.’

In a Habermasian perspective, we have to ask what role popular education can play in general, and in study circles in particular, in supporting personal and social change as discussed in CONFINTEA’s *Global Report*. Expressed in the words of EU discourse, in what ways can study circles be a means to ‘active citizenship and shared values to promote the development of social capital and social cohesion’ (EC, 2011a, p. 57)? When discussing potential impact, it is important to distinguish between study circles aimed at the members of the movement (internal function) and the learning efforts focusing on the general public (external function). Despite the close link between the social movements and popular education, studies have repeatedly found that the overwhelming number of circles are aimed at the general public and not aimed at the members and the internal function of social movements, as used to be the case before the state subsidies were introduced (Andersén, Lundin and Sundgren, 2003; Andersson *et al.*, 1996; Sköld and Åström, 1989). However, if we, like the Swedish Parliamentary Commission on the State of Democracy (Rothstein, 1995), ascribe to democracy as dialogue, a study circle for the general public may be an important instrument. Habermas (1989) notes that deliberation requires citizens’ capacity to

advance persuasive claims and initiate public discussions about concerns, but he also worries that the signals social movements send out are not strong enough to affect broader learning processes or have immediate impact on the political system. In a direct response to Habermas' doubt about the role social movements can play, Larsson (2001) notes that popular education, with its study circles, provides such an arena where people can meet and dialogue in an informal way. According to his view, a study circle can be regarded as a specific public sphere that provides an opportunity for individuals to transform their individuality to citizenship through participation. Ample evidence for this perspective is provided in a larger study, *The Study Circle Society* (Andersson *et al.* 1996). The findings of this study support the position that the circle participants foster a communicative rationality rather than an instrumental one. However, it is less clear that participants in external circles use this communication to organise and coordinate their actions in order to improve their collective situation. At times it occurs but it appears that this is not typical for the large majority of circles. The conclusion of *The Study Circle Society* is that while the open circles are mainly places where participants pursue personal interests, they also are a place for deliberation which takes place in 'a social space generated in communicative action' (Habermas, 1996, p. 360). In that respect, the authors conclude, study circles contribute to the forming of citizenship, to local democracy and to the integration of the local community. This conclusion is supported by research on political behaviour that confirms the positive impact of discussion on future political participation (Pattie and Johnston, 2009). Thus, popular education, with its location in civil society, constitutes a communicative space where social problems can be formulated and reformulated in ways that ultimately can strengthen the political public sphere (see Habermas, 1996, p. 365). An important step in this process is that civil society, here in the form of popular education, 'has the opportunity of mobilising counterknowledge and drawing on the pertinent forms of expertise to make its own translations' (*ibid.*, p. 372).

## Concluding note

As noted in the introductory section, the last five years have seen a growing reference in EU policy documents to the humanistic and democratic role of adult and lifelong learning. This does not in any way imply that the economic motives are subsiding but rather that the

balance has shifted somewhat. The recent policies may reflect a shift in the dominant political economy away from a hard neoliberal position to one which is more embedded in what has come to be known as inclusive liberalism (see Craig and Porter, 2006; Mahone and McBride, 2008). I shall not discuss this point here but am content to argue that if those responsible for implementing the 2011 renewed European agenda for adult learning a) are serious about realising the agenda and b) are true to their rhetoric about evidence-based reforms, they will have to seriously reflect on the role that popular education can play. The agenda speaks about improving adults' 'ability to adapt to changes in the labour market and society' and how adult learning provides a means for meeting not only employment and work related demands but also makes 'important contributions to social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development' (EC, 2011c, p. 2). However, if this is not to remain empty rhetoric the EU has to realise that it is not enough to increasingly anchor adult learning reforms 'in overall developments in education and training, notably the development of national qualifications frameworks and lifelong learning strategies' (*ibid.*, p. 5). Fostering active citizenship, shared values and ultimately the instruments by which a person can command her life, will demand a broader framework that also incorporates the values and processes as they manifest themselves in popular education.

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## PART II

# Historical perspectives



## CHAPTER THREE

# **The idea of democratic *bildung*: Its transformations in space and time**

*Bernt Gustavsson*

### **Introduction**

The word *bildung* is difficult to translate into English, and different languages and traditions adopt and express the idea in different ways. But at the same time there is a common core of the concept, about human development, personally and socially. This mostly takes place in education, which has an ambition to widen the understanding of knowledge and develop education into an activity with meaning, and not just a limited instrumental activity. In this chapter I want to highlight the transformations of the concept, both in space and time, and illustrate its continued relevance today. What I intend to show are the characteristics of the Nordic and Swedish tradition and how the transformations of *bildung* occurred. I also want to discuss the fact that the democratic form of *bildung*, expressed as popular education, is challenged today by globalisation. The problems encountered here have to be treated in a new way, in contemporary society and education, in order to develop *bildung* in relation to the demanding global problems of today.

First, I will discuss the concept of *bildung* and then I will continue with the Nordic and Swedish traditions of popular education. Lastly, I will demonstrate the international or global transformations of *bildung* today.

## The concept of *bildung*

Bildung has deep roots in western culture going back to the classical Greeks and the idea of *paideia*, the schooling of the citizen. From the start it referred to the formation of a human being, expressed in the metaphor of the sculptor carving out a form from raw material. This ‘forming’ became the Latin word ‘*formatio*’, and was taken into the French language as ‘formation’. Bildung is in this sense the forming and self-formation of the human being. From the renaissance and up to about 1800, bildung was informed by two key elements: a free, endless process which originated from the Greeks; and a picture of the ideal, brought from Christian mysticism, *Imago Dei* (Gustavsson, 1991). As a free process it means that it starts from where we are and what we are, and involves a potentially endless personal process of development. In the classical tradition the ultimate ideal is what the process leads to. This is transformed from the ideal image of God, into certain types of human beings, the ideal educated ‘Man’, such as Leonardo da Vinci or Wolfgang Goethe. In popular education this goal is transformed into common social goals for popular movements, about democratic society, justice and equality. These two elements, the free process and the ideal picture, or a goal, can be followed throughout history in different versions. They are also a key to analyse the transformations of bildung in space and time.

The main idea in the humanism of the renaissance is that human nature is free to be anything, an angel or a beast, and as such humans are distinctly different from other species in nature, which are limited by their instincts. In neohumanism, from 1760 onwards, the forming of human nature takes its influence from the classical Greeks, the ideal picture of human culture, in philosophy, in arts, in politics and as an ideal to live in harmony with oneself and society. In most periods and places one of these elements of bildung has been dominant. In the romantic era the free genius was considered to have created himself/herself in a totally free process. When bildung was institutionalised, it was mostly transformed into the ideal of the true educated man, for example one who read the right kind of books, mostly the classics. In some moments in history, the two parts of the concept have been wisely balanced, and these have been the most fruitful periods in the history of bildung. This was the case in Germany, in the time of Vilhelm von Humboldt, and when the tradition of Swedish popular education was created a hundred years later, from 1880 and for a few decades later. The creators of the

ideas of popular education had the ambition to combine the free search for knowledge and human development with the ideals and goals of popular movements. It was a right for everyone to participate in order to create democracy and a just society (Gustavsson, 1991).

## The Nordic tradition

A key influence from Germany in 1760 was Gottfried Herder. He was opposed to the French enlightenment and the idea of rational universalism, and held that every nation was specific in terms of language, folk and culture. To find the true spirit of a nation, it should be sought in the tales and songs of the people; an idea of a nation and a people as a unit which was brought to Denmark by Grundtvig. He founded the idea of a folk high school during the phase of national liberation from Germany in the 1840s. This is the root of the Nordic tradition of popular education. Young people should have the possibility of having a free period to search their way of life and to study questions about themselves and society. But as a consequence of national relativism the tradition was formed differently in each Nordic country. Grundtvig's main idea was *the enlightenment of the people, or the enlightenment of life*. Here, enlightenment means something different from a belief in reason, science and progress. It means to enlighten the minds of young people, to make them able to find their own way in life. And this could be the enlightenment of the people's minds to find their own roots. Grundtvig identified a part of the German tradition of bildung with the established institution of the Latin school, characterised by the dead syllable, in opposition to the living word transformed among the people (Korsgaard, 1998). In Norway, at least half of the established folk high schools were named Grundtvigian, '*frilynta*', while the other half were run by the church. The church adopted the idea of bildung in a different way, in a more authoritarian style. The Grundtvig tradition embodied the idea of a free process, expressed in terms of 'human first, and then Christian', while the church was more committed to a true belief in the meaning of religion. So we can talk about a living Nordic tradition, taken forward by folk high schools, with both similarities and differences (Gustavsson and Andersdotter, 2010). However, 'the people' in Sweden was more identified with the labouring class, while in Denmark the 'people' was identified as a national unit (Nordvall, 2009). This emanates from the building of the Danish nation while in Sweden popular education was

built from popular movements in society. The main question appears to be what we mean by ‘the people’ – all human beings or a select group?

## **The Swedish tradition**

Grundtvig had limited influence in Sweden. Here the concept of bildung was transformed from another German context, mainly from a Kantian influence, into a new version of bildung, in opposition to an elitist education established in the parallel school system, which was organised on the basis of one school for the lower classes and one for the upper classes (Gustavsson, 1991). With the prefix ‘folk’ the word ‘*folkbildning*’ was established in Swedish; ‘*bildning*’ as a translation from bildung. The symbol of Swedish popular education was the study circle, created formally in 1902, while the first folk high school was established earlier in 1868. Their development follows the path of the struggle for democracy. It is a kind of democratisation – ‘bildung, not just for the people, but also through the people’. It was people in the popular movements – the labour, temperance and the free-church movements – who, together with democratic intellectuals, created this tradition (Gustavsson, 1991). The folk high school was initially only for farmers, to educate their sons to participate in political assemblies and to learn new methods in agriculture. The folk high school in this sense is more in the ideal of bildung of the citizen and is utilitarian. In Sweden the working class and women were marginalised in the first phase of development. But during the first decades of the twentieth century they struggled for a place in these schools and created their own institutions (Gustavsson and Andersdotter, 2010).

The ideas of bildung produced in the popular movements motivated and legitimated their activity, the idea that we learn when we search out our own knowledge, and use it for individual and social purposes. One of the main Swedish intellectual influences was a former folk high school teacher and professor in philosophy, Hans Larsson (1908). He was a Kantian who produced books and articles about bildung and it was one of his students, Oscar Olsson, who developed the study circle. A third influential person was Ellen Key, who gave women a voice in the dominant patriarchal movements. She coined an expression for bildung which is still used today: ‘bildung is what is left when we have forgotten what we have learned’ (Key, 1897, 1900). This means that there is a difference between being schooled or informed and having knowledge

and experiences which we have assimilated into ourselves. She directed sharp criticism towards the school system, expressed in her famous book, *The Century of the Child* (1900). She called learning in schools ‘parrot fashion’, that is without personal meaning for the pupils.

The central idea these intellectuals promoted was that *bildung* was something which took place through people’s own initiative, activity and experiences (Gustavsson, 1991). The very idea of a study circle is to start from the experiences of the participants and discuss these in the circle, where the book, literature, was the stimulus for the group discussion. The leader is one of the group and not a traditional teacher. This formed an ideal for *bildung*, called ‘*självbildning*’, or ‘self-education’. In the idea of self-education there is a great emphasis on the free process, in the sense that searching for knowledge starts from oneself. This reform pedagogy, or progressive tradition, started with Rousseau and influenced Ellen Key. Still today, there is a particular form of pedagogy related to popular education, presented in the pronouncements from study associations and folk high schools. In this tradition the point of departure for knowledge is the subject’s own experiences, alternative forms of studying, built on the motivation and interest of the participants. But there is still a recurring theme of an ideal picture of an educated person whose goals are formulated in terms of the goals of popular movements, professions and political goals of equality and justice. The sign of this tradition is that it is free in the sense that people participate by choice and can decide the content and form of their own studies. In sum, *bildung* is your own activity and you learn both as a person and as a citizen, they are combined.

The first study circle was created in the temperance movement in 1902, relatively independent from the folk high schools. In order to make it possible, with financial support from the state, the study circles were organised into associations. The first study association, *The Workers Educational Association*, was created in 1912, in a folk high school. The connection between the libraries and the circles was close from the beginning. The ideal study circle had its place in the library, where there was an opportunity to connect personal experiences with general human experiences as described in literature. Different organisations joined together to form a common study association. Today there are 10 study associations and about 150 folk high schools.

The fight for access to the folk high schools for others than farmers took place from the 1890s, but access first occurred in the economic

crisis in the 1930s, when a number of groups from the working class demanded entry to these institutions. Many young people found their 'life paths' and professions through this route and many authors and politicians started their career in these institutions.

At the same time there were, throughout the twentieth century, discussions about the common Nordic tradition, held by many to be a Grundtvigian tradition, particularly in the folk high schools. This view was influenced by a French researcher who wrote one of the first dissertations on the subject, published in the French language (Simon, 1960). But the Swedish folk high school was from the start more oriented to utilitarianism than to the living word and enlightenment of life (Gustavsson and Andersdotter, 2010). This can still be the case and is a difference between the Nordic countries today. When the idea of folk high schools spread to other European countries, and later into the wider world, it was mainly in the Grundtvigian form. We have to move on to 1960 to see the establishment of the Swedish version outside the Nordic countries, in Tanzania (Nordvall, 2009). Today they are found in many African countries and in other parts of the southern hemisphere. Even the study circle has been established in other countries and parts of the world (Nordvall, 2009).

## **The Swedish tradition in transition**

The first phase of popular education could be called the creation of the ideas and the establishment of institutions; once they were established they were filled with different forms of content. There were new kinds of education, and new motivations for different activities and courses. I have called this form of popular education, folk high schools, institutions creating equality (Gustavsson, Andersdotter and Sjöman, 2009). There has always been an ambition to argue, in relation to the State, that these forms of education were a good alternative to the established school system. People who did not find they had a place in the ordinary school system could discover themselves and find a new path in life. It has also been a requirement that these institutions should provide an alternative form of schooling. Negotiations with the State have been ongoing as it has been their main source of funding. The flexibility to adapt to new circumstances and needs in society is a symbol of folk high schools. The true course was the general course, open to everybody, but mostly aimed at the underprivileged. At the same time there were courses to prepare

for professional forms of education and education for special professions. In a true Grundtvigian folk high school there was no connection at all to professions, but in practice these courses existed, and in some places there were many of them (Gustavsson and Andersdotter, 2010). So the ideas and practice were not always consistent and could be contradictory.

The idea of *bildung* was marginalised in the phase of fast modernisation through economic and technological development after the Second World War. From 1950 to 1980 the idea seemed to lose its significance and meaning. The dynamic economic growth and the expansion of mass education marginalised the concept, and it was criticised for being conservative, petrified into a refinement of human beings, and was equated with reading special classics in literature. During this phase the idea of *bildung* was interpreted in a classical, conservative neohumanistic tradition, while the original idea of a free process was forgotten.

From the beginning of the 1980s we can identify a renaissance of *bildung* in the Nordic countries. Research into the tradition started and the classical German tradition was radicalised in the sense that the free process was recreated and reemphasised. The initiative for a new interpretation was taken from the ideological left and a socially and educationally progressive tradition through which reinterpretations of the tradition of *bildung* and popular education were made.

The remarkable thing was that both the concepts of *bildung* and that of popular education were reestablished in political documents in 1991 and 1992 in Sweden. (Folkbildningspropositionen, 1991; Skola för *bildning*, 1992). The argument of support for them is mainly expressed as an opposition to 'economic man' and efficient education to produce human capital. A programme and a goal from above, formulated by the state or a board was in contradiction to *bildung* as a free process. A top-down form of governance is in contradiction to *bildung*, where people themselves formulate their wishes and goals. But it was a classical conception of both *bildung* in the school system and popular education that took place. One of the main reasons for establishing these concepts was to present a democratic and humanistic alternative to the growing economisation of education. This development started in the middle of the 1980s and grew into interpretations of education as an investment in human capital and knowledge as a commodity, in the name of lifelong learning, produced by the EU and OECD (Gustavsson, 1996). The consequences were that the ideas of *bildung*, humanism and democratic dimensions were once again marginalised in Sweden and Europe. However, this development

has been met by attempts in research and philosophy to develop bildung in relation to contemporary transformations in society, to make it into an international or global concept. This has been made in relation to humanistic values and democratic thinking, which is reflected in some trends in liberal adult education.

## **The transformation of liberal education**

When the tradition of bildung was introduced in Anglo-Saxon countries it was named 'liberal education'. The main institutions were colleges and some universities, mostly within the humanities. A residential adult college and a Nordic folk high school have a lot in common, such as students and teachers live at the school and the personal relationship between teachers and participants is important. The main classical idea in liberal adult education is 'great books' and some kind of general courses in history of culture or the humanities. The democratic form of education, schooling workers or underprivileged people, mostly took place at the universities, in departments of extra-mural studies.

In the 1990s the transformation of liberal education in American colleges was studied by Martha C. Nussbaum, described and analysed in her book *Cultivating Humanity* (1997). She describes the reform of liberal education in terms of more multicultural courses and the study of other traditions, outside of the western tradition. Humanities had usually been limited solely to the western classics, but with students from other parts of the world, with other experiences, the courses have expanded beyond these constraints. Her conclusion for this new form of liberal education was to combine critical reflection, train narrative imagination and the study of other cultures. This is one of the first attempts to take the idea of bildung outside the limitations of western culture. Liberal education has traditionally been elitist but in a recent development of the tradition, a space has opened up for a new understanding of the humanities and their role in democracy. In her recent book, *Not for Profit*, Nussbaum argues for the necessity of humanities for democratic development. The deeper purpose of liberal education is to go beyond personal advancement or national competitiveness and educate responsible global citizens who have the skills to collaborate across differences and borders, in order to solve pressing global problems (Nussbaum, 2010). This opening up of liberal education to other ideas and experiences is also reflected in some of the transitional themes explicitly linked to the meaning of bildung.

## **Bildung as a journey**

A classical notion of bildung is to travel to other countries and cultures in order to widen horizons, experience and understanding. Bildung as a journey has developed today into a concept where travel is a metaphor for human interpretation of the world, understanding and personal development. There is a hidden concept in the work of Hans Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, which describes bildung as travel, or an excursion and return, and into a concept of education for a world citizen. Gadamer's work *Truth and Method* (1989) takes his point of departure from a few humanistic, classical concepts, and names bildung as the most important, the most productive and influential concept of the eighteenth century. His ambition is to give the humanities a new framework and he develops the tradition of hermeneutics in its modern shape. The key words to understand bildung as a journey are the known and the unknown, *the acquainted and the unacquainted*. The individual travels, metaphorically speaking, from the already known, and from there we make an excursion and open ourselves to experience the unknown and foreign. We return to where we started and what we come back to is a new home, because of the new experiences we have made in opening ourselves up to new interpretations. This is linked to central concepts in the tradition of bildung, where dialogue, understanding, being open to something new, relating oneself to the world we live in, are important. I have introduced this concept of bildung in the Nordic countries (Gustavsson, 1996). The Danish philosopher Peter Kemp, also partly inspired by Grundtvig, took this concept of bildung as a point of departure for forming the idea of the world citizen. I had myself built this concept of bildung on Hans Georg Gadamer and on the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. Here, the connection between the individual and the social is reestablished; a good life with and for others, in just institutions, are the code words here.

Kemp, also inspired by Ricoeur, describes a central concept for bildung, *mimesis*. He also starts from the idea of critically considering one's own tradition and heritage, the reflective life and the necessity to study the other in a globalised world. *Mimesis* is a classical concept, developed by Ricoeur, in his book (1984–1988) where he takes two concepts of time, lived time and cosmic time and looks for bridges between them. In the calendar, cosmic time is inscribed in lived time, in the shift of generations and the narrative in which we connect our

own life with that of humanity. We live our life, and when we tell our life story and read others' life stories we make reinterpretations of the life we live and this changes our life, our actions and understanding. *Mimesis* is, in the classical sense, imitation, but here it is developed in three phases. 1. The pre-narrative life we live, our experiences and everyday life. 2. The narrative, the stories we tell, listen to or read, from ourselves and from others. 3. The refiguration of our life through the narrative. A human being is considered to be a storytelling creature. We tell our stories and read others', and the narrative transforms our understanding of ourselves, and the world in which we live. Narratives are today used in historical science, in psychotherapy, in literature and in research. It is in this sense the very core of how we create meaning in our life. The question is then, what stories do we read and listen to? Moreover, in the digital era with changing patterns of communication the possibility for new stories to be told seems to have increased and, in the process, offers some democratic possibilities and new directions for the transformation of bildung.

## **Globalisation and the information age**

Globalisation and the information society have produced two transformations of bildung: the technocultural bildung and postcolonial bildung. The Norwegian philosopher Lars Lövlie (2007) coined the concept of *technocultural bildung*. Starting from a classical concept in relation to Kant and Humboldt, he looks at the implications for bildung of the Internet. Classical bildung can be described as the interface where the self and culture meet, the places where the personal and individual meet the collective culture. The transformation goes from a 'real' interface into virtual places, which are continuously moving, transformed and created again and again, which suggests that the stable personality in the classical concept of bildung is transformed. Lövlie takes Donna Haraway's (1991) concept of *cyborg* as his instrument. *Cyborg* is the word for the connection, the interface, between the human being and technology. Our connections to technology make us into cyborgs in the sense that we are continually interacting with technologies in everyday life. This means that the classical place for locating bildung, in the stable personality, is transformed into the relation between the human and technology; the place for bildung is transformed into the space, the interface, between where the machine and the human being

meet. The implication for Lövlie is that the processes of *bildung* take place at the net and in the hypertext on the Internet.

The other key influence is the *postcolonial tradition*, where critical studies focus on understanding oppression from the west towards other parts of the world. A typical postcolonial writer is Salman Rushdie, who in his books expresses hybridity of identity. This means that we are a mixture of many different backgrounds. No group can be considered to have just one identity or style of living. This has been expressed in terms of ‘the third space’. In contemporary society hybridity is the identity, expressed for instance by Rushdie in his Satanic Verses. According to Bhabha (1994, p. 56):

*It is in the ‘inter’ – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the inbetween space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, antinationalist histories of the ‘people’. And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves.*

In the average picture of multiculturalism, society is considered to consist of diversity in terms of homogenous groups. The postcolonial perspective opposes this and describes society in terms of differences, not diversity. Difference means that something new is created in the third space. This is not the same as integration, which always reproduces the power of the west, or the colonial normality.

In Sweden, the postcolonial idea of *bildung* has been described through a new interpretation of Goethe’s concept of world literature. The traditional understanding is that Goethe meant the spreading of the great classical books out to other parts of the world whereas a post-colonial interpretation says that world literature is where *different forms of literature from different parts of the world are mirrored in each other* (Jonsson, 2007). This means that all literature is particular but when mirrored in each other we can talk of world literature. *Bildung* here is widened to encompass the whole world. This new interpretation opens possibilities to transform the concept of *bildung* into a true global concept. The literature, philosophy and social science produced in this field open up new understandings both of the other and of ourselves. The universal is not immediately related to the west or Europe, a new understanding of the universal, in relation to differences and diversity, is opened up.

## A global concept of *bildung*

To summarise, we have followed the international transformations of *bildung* in different forms – the classical German, or the neo-humanistic concept of *bildung*; liberal education, or arts education; and hermeneutic *bildung* or *bildung* as a journey. These have been transformed from a national frame into a global one and through this process the changing interpretations of the three versions can be recognised. There are attempts to transform the classical tradition into a technocultural concept of *bildung*, relevant to the information age, and a postcolonial version (Lövlie, 2007; Jonsson, 2007). The postcolonial perspective opens up a space to think about *bildung* as global and universal in a new sense, and to include the former colonised parts of the world. In the tradition of liberal education the concept is transformed into a global understanding, mainly through the work of Martha C Nussbaum in the USA (Nussbaum, 1997). *Bildung* as a journey is derived from hermeneutics, as a relation between the known and the unknown or an excursion and return (Weinsheimer, 1985; Gustavsson, 1996). This is taken further in the idea of the education of the world citizen, developed by the Danish philosopher Peter Kemp in relation to a wider understanding of hermeneutics and into a postcolonial version which also develops this theory (Kemp, 2011; Cavalcante-Schuback, 2006).

Both Nussbaum's and Kemp's development of *bildung* into the schooling of world citizens takes the concept out of a limited western context, and opens up new possibilities to make the concept truly global. To use 'bildung' in Africa or South America sounds strange. But there are other concepts and other forms of popular education, which have taken place (Freire, 1976), which has inspired Nordic popular education, and is frequently used in these countries in the name of a pedagogy of the oppressed. Freire can be placed in the stream of progressive pedagogy with his idea of the necessity to start with people's own experiences and to build education around certain areas of problems, which are central for the participants. This can be further developed into a postcolonial concept, where the connection to the third space takes place. The space between the acquainted and the unacquainted, where new creations, imagination and new interpretations are made, can be linked to the concept of third space and hybridity. This means that new interpretations are made in the space between the known and unknown, they are

unpredictable. The acquainted is on its way to being reinterpreted into something new. *Diversity* from a traditional, hermeneutic view emphasises the tradition and stable homogenous groups integrated with one another. *Difference* tells us that the difference can and has to exist and does not necessarily have to be integrated into a greater whole. Then we are in the creation of a new form of transformation.

## Conclusion

I have described the democratic tradition of *bildung*, as it took place in the Nordic countries from 1850 and the development up to today. These traditions are national or nationalistic in their self-understanding. Today, in a globalised world, these traditions have to be renewed and transformed into an international or global understanding. We have seen how the very concept of *bildung* in research and writings is transformed into a global concept. There are transformations taking place in the effective history of the concept. It is spread from one classical version in the elite school system and higher education, to another in different forms of popular education. The idea is adopted educationally and culturally in different contexts. These strands we can follow, both in history and today, and perceive how many different interpretations are made all over the world. The very aim and ambition of the transformation of this tradition is to contribute to humanism and democracy on a global scale. This is clearly expressed as an alternative to national competition within education systems, which is taking place globally. Today we can see how education adopts national competition as its first goal. If all education is directed and governed by efficiency goals, formulated from above and directed to the market, we can forget the humanistic and democratic dimensions of education. The EU term *employability* tells us to take the shortest path from education to the professions. If the very core of searching out knowledge is to make detours, to search, to investigate in our own way, then the very core of knowledge is lost. It takes time to appropriate knowledge into something integrated into oneself, a necessary condition to use it in professions and life. In an unpredictable world the citizen has to have a broader view of society and our own life in order to survive. In a time of globalisation there is a clear tendency for *bildung* to be increasingly understood as a universal idea. Not in the old sense of saying western culture is spreading its light over the world, but one where all differences and diversities are included

in the wave of globalisation. In this case we can understand bildung in a new way. The classical meaning of bildung is when the individual relates him or herself to the experiences of humanity. To take this thought a step further, the human and humanity should include everybody, with all different cultures and differences.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

# **Popular education and the empowerment of women: A historical perspective**

*Kerstin Rydbeck*

### **Introduction**

Women's organisations have largely remained outside the organisational structure that grew up around popular education in Sweden in the twentieth century. The aim of this presentation is to attempt to elucidate why this was the case; how those in study associations looked upon women's educational work in general and how they regarded the educational activities run within women's organisations.<sup>1</sup> Special attention is paid to the extensive and significant reform of state subsidies for popular education instituted in the late 1940s. However, in order to understand the background to what happened, we must first look backwards in time. Moreover, it is important to look more closely at the Swedish concept of *folkbildning* (popular education) in a broader perspective.

The words *folk* (people) and *bildning* (general education) are bound in time and highly determined by ideology. In depictions of the early educational initiatives that emerged in the nineteenth century, it is usually pointed out that those advocating this type of education belonged to the social elite who directed their ambitions downward, towards the lowest classes of society, 'the people'. Those who were to be educated constituted passive objects of these activities and had no say in defining what should be ascertained as general education. It

was a patriarchal educational ideal, designed to preserve rather than to change the fundamental power relations in society (Rydbeck, 1997). In accounts of modern popular education, that developed within the major popular movements around the turn of the twentieth century and was fully established around 1950, the opposite is usually asserted, that it had – and still has in the twenty-first century – the goal of placing the person improving him/herself at the centre and allowing this person to define his or her educational needs. Thus, in the true sense of the word, popular education must take as its starting point the abilities, needs and wishes of the participants. The participant must be the subject. Other important aspects that are usually emphasised in the definition are that these activities have an empowering dimension: they must strengthen democracy and be liberating – contribute to change. The concept of 'people' has also been broadened, and now comprises everyone, regardless of class. As a whole, twentieth-century popular education is usually described as emancipatory in its thrust and has been closely tied to the concept of citizenship (Bergstedt and Larsson, 1995; Rydbeck, 1997; Sundgren, 1998).

However, it is not merely a matter of what theoretical and ideological meanings we choose to give the two words, but equally about what concrete activities have come to be defined as constituting popular education. As various forms of educational activities have been supported by public means since the late nineteenth century in Sweden, in practice the concept of popular education has become inextricably linked to the system of public subsidies. It has mostly been specifically associated with those institutions pursuing voluntary educational activities which are defined as popular education for the purposes of receiving public subsidies. This rigid connection of the concept with the system of subsidies has entailed an institution-based and rather narrow definition of popular education that can be termed *institutionalised popular education*. Other educational activities, that in terms of content and ideology fulfil the criteria to be called popular education, have been excluded and thereby rendered invisible (Rydbeck, 2001).

The class perspective has always been the self-evident point of departure for discussions of the concept of popular education, both among representatives of institutionalised popular education and in research. It should never be forgotten that the modern institutions, ideals and methods of popular education emerged precisely as an alternative to and (to some extent) *among* those who for reasons of class did not have

access to public higher education. However, considering that roughly half of the population was still excluded from parts of this provision due to their *gender* when modern popular education began to take shape, it is naturally equally important to reflect upon these activities from a gender perspective, something which so far has been done only to a limited degree. This is imperative regarding the expected emancipatory function, the objective of advancing democracy and the focus on the concept of citizenship. What have institutionalised, popular education and its ideals and methods regarding general education meant in terms of strengthening the positions of women, for example, their political influence and social commitment? What has the concept of popular education of women's citizenship looked like in practice? What has happened when women and men disagreed about how it should be defined and pursued? This is important, not least in terms of how the power to decide what counts as popular education has determined the allocation of the considerable sums set aside by Swedish society precisely for institutionalised popular education, from the late 1800s till today.

### **'Gender-neutral' popular education by and for men – the study associations**

Let us start our search for answers to these questions by looking at what the discussion looked like in a study circle around the time of the establishment of the very first study associations.

*Br Ivar Boström introduced a discussion question 'Can women be interested in cultural and social matters?' and justified his introducing the question by pointing out that the situation was such within the Circle that no women belonged to the Circle. The debate showed that some speakers felt that women actually might be interested in spiritual cultivation, if only they had proper leadership. After the members expressed this as their opinion, the question was declared sufficiently discussed (ESA, minutes 25/02/1910).*

The above quotation is from the minutes of the Good Templar study circle in 1910 in Eskilstuna, a town in the middle of Sweden, and illustrates a problem the circle struggled with throughout the period of activity I studied – from its establishment in 1906 to 1924 – namely, the great difficulty of attracting women members and then getting them

to stay. The role of women had already been up for debate before the above discussion took place. The question was thus whether ‘women of our time devote themselves to keeping the home to the extent that might be wished’ – which resulted in a lively discussion of the matter ‘from both the political and the socio-economic angles’ and in a decision that the circle would answer the question in the negative (ESA, minutes 22/09/1909).

While the male participants in this officially gender-equal organisation regarded the absence of women in the circle as a problem, they expressed a view based on traditional difference-based thinking, according to which the woman’s place was in the private sphere of the home. Those men who considered women capable of intellectual development – which the above shows did *not* comprise all men – stressed women’s need for male leadership. In accordance with this view, the circle decided in 1911 that women would have free admittance to its meetings as observers. In this way, they could be taught how educational work ought to be pursued. But this initiative was not successful, since there is no mention in the minutes that any women attended during the following year, either as observers or as paying members. Their interest in the activities remained weak. However, women who were not members were occasionally engaged for the circle’s social gatherings, to provide refreshments or entertain the men with singing as they drank their coffee (e.g., ESA, minutes 28/02/1908 and 29/03/1912).

The male members never considered that traditional difference-based thinking, and the negative view of women’s intellectual capacity they expressed, might *per se* help explain why women did not have the opportunity or the will to become involved in the work of study circles. If women did not wish to, or could not adapt to the male norms, this merely confirmed the assumption that they were generally uninterested in intellectual development or lacked the wherewithal. The Eskilstuna Good Templars’ study circle activities might have had an emancipatory function from a class perspective, but from a gender perspective this was not the case. There was little scope for women to define their own educational needs. They did not stand out as real subjects in the educational process but were rather objects controlled from above, by men, in line with the old patriarchal ideal of popular education from the nineteenth century – which these men of the new popular movements had themselves rejected from a class perspective. Of course, the idea that the main role of women was to look after the home and children was

embraced by most people – including women – in the early twentieth century. But it is perhaps more remarkable that men could believe that women would freely and voluntarily become involved in educational activities which explicitly expressed doubt that they were at all educable.

The strong male dominance and the notion that modern women were shirking their duties as wives and mothers were not unique to the Eskilstuna Good Templar's study circle. In his study of a local Good Templar Lodge in Holmsund, a small community in the north east of Sweden, intellectual historian Ronny Ambjörnsson points to the same phenomenon. He also maintains that this attitude towards women seems to have become more entrenched in the late 1920s and early 1930s, that is, after women had gained the franchise and become full citizens (Ambjörnsson, 1988).

Men shaped the educational ideals and methods and put them into practice in institutionalised popular education according to their own interests, which were often coloured by their engagement in politics, although officially admission to the institutions was gender neutral. Researcher in adult education Jane M. Hugo describes this phenomenon, where men attend to and treat as significant only what men say, as the 'circle effect', which acts as a barrier for women's participation (Hugo, 1990). Statistics from the study circle activities of the study associations show that women took little part in the activities up to the late 1940s, although the situation could vary considerably across study associations (Rydbeck, 2001). One way for women who were interested in studying to partially get around the problem of dominating and condescending men was to create single-gender study groups within the male-controlled organisations, groups for women only. One group within the women's movement that chose this strategy was the political women's auxiliaries, who consistently aligned themselves with the study associations created by the parent party. In Holmsund in the 1920s and 1930s, the Social-Democratic Women's Club created its own meeting culture, distinguished by combining discussions, socialising and domestic work. According to Ambjörnsson, these meetings were well attended, generally attracting more participants than the meetings of the local branch of the Social-Democratic Party. Reading aloud was common, often from feminist-oriented literature; they started their own library and organised the study course 'Our Diet' (Ambjörnsson, 1988). Within the consumers' cooperative, which was also part of the Workers' Study Association, women's guilds conducted extensive

study activities from the 1930s onwards, with, for example, courses in domestic science and home economics. They also tried to stimulate interest in literature among members by distributing book packages (Åkerman, 1983).

Another route was for women to turn their backs on institutionalised popular education and its male-controlled structures and set off on their own. The best-known example of this strategy was the Women's College for Civic Training at Fogelstad, an estate in the middle of Sweden. The College was active between 1925 and 1954 and to a great extent based their educational principles and teaching methods on those of the folk high schools but deliberately elected not to use that designation, choosing instead to locate their activities in a historical context of the women's movement (Eskilsson, 1991; Knutson, 2004). This allowed them to work more freely both practically and ideologically and to safeguard their women's perspective. At the same time, however, they lost out on the public subsidies they could have received as a folk high school, leaving them to arrange their own financing. The same was true of independent women's associations, such as the Fredrika Bremer Association and the Housewives' League. They too pursued their educational work mainly without ties to the institutions for popular education.

## **Swedish women's free educational work before the 1940s**

The consequence of the relatively low proportion of women in the activities of study associations was that women's efforts for general education in the mid-1940s were still dismissed as 'newly awakened', something that did not have to be taken too seriously (Leander, 1948). If we glance back through history, however, we find initiatives taken by women for the purpose of addressing women's own needs already in existence in the latter half of the nineteenth century, in an interaction with the political reforms carried out during this period and directly or indirectly impacting on women's educational opportunities. Members of the bourgeois elite took these initiatives and on the one hand, there were philanthropic projects directed downwards socially and designed to provide opportunities for education for girls from the lowest social classes and contact with women from the 'cultivated' classes. But primarily these were projects for general education that targeted their own class, in other words, initiatives for women in the upper levels of

society. From a contemporary point of view, this was hardly a matter of popular education, as the concept of ‘people’ was still synonymous with the lowest class of menial labourers. But from the vantage point of the present, we should regard these initiatives as such without debate, because women’s educational opportunities were generally so limited, regardless of their class. Nor can it be denied that the privileged women from the bourgeois elite who took these initiatives wished to bring about a fundamental transformation of society. It was a matter of using education to improve the conditions and positions for women as a group – for *all* women, irrespective of class – to achieve a change in the gender system, as we would put it today (Rydbeck, 2008).

This early work for women’s general education includes the various initiatives taken by the Swedish feminist writer and publisher Sophie Adlersparre and the group surrounding her in the late 1850s and beyond, ultimately culminating in the formation of the Fredrika Bremer Association in 1884, named after the famous Swedish feminist writer. The issue of education was regarded as absolutely central, ensuring that concrete study efforts were afforded great scope from the very beginning. Among other goals, this new organisation wanted to support women in systematically developing their theoretical knowledge with the help of correspondence courses, which were entirely new in Sweden at the time (Manns, 1997).

Early initiatives also included the folk high schools for women that were established in the 1860s and 1870s, though they did not manage to survive very long (Larsson, 1997), as well as activities undertaken by the Twelve. The Twelve was a group of intellectual women, formed in 1892, who invited women from the labouring class to partake in joint social gatherings for the purpose of general education, in a spirit of bridging class differences (Persson, 1991).

When the women’s suffrage movement emerged after the turn of the twentieth century, roughly at the same time as modern popular education, concrete educational efforts came to play an extremely prominent role in its activities. On the one hand, within the National Association for Women’s Franchise, there was an interest in women’s general education. But they also had insight into the need for specific educational initiatives in connection with suffrage reforms, so that women would understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens and truly be in a position to make use of their right to exert political influence. Lecture tours, discussion clubs and intensive course programmes were pursued for

the purpose of schooling women in political thinking and modes of working (Florin and Rönnbäck, 2001; Florin, 2006).

Later on, after women won the right to vote and the franchise movement had formally been dissolved, the Fredrika Bremer Association attempted to enhance women's capacity to make use of their newly acquired political rights by arranging courses and study circles (Åkerman, 1983). It is important to point out, however, that educational efforts within the franchise movement, the Fredrika Bremer Association and the women's auxiliaries to the political parties were shaped by a principle regarding women's participation in politics that was based on a fundamentally traditional gender-based division of labour. In political work, women were to complement – not compete with – men, and were expected to be involved in issues closely related to their sphere of responsibility within the family. Studies and political schooling were therefore largely oriented towards social issues associated with family, childcare, housing, youth, poverty and social welfare. There were also courses specifically targeting homemakers. In their educational work, women's organisations came to formulate a concept of citizenship that in practical terms was tied to the role of the homemaker and motherhood – what the political scientist Ruth Lister defines as the explicitly gender differentiated model for citizenship (Lister, 2003).

## **The 1945 committee on educational work in women's organisations**

Nonetheless, despite the fact that women's organisations basically aligned their efforts for general education with a traditional, gender-based division of labour, it was not easy for them to find acceptance for their educational work. In 1944 a new governmental commission was appointed to review the government's support for popular education. This prompted women's organisations to join together to form a committee to investigate for themselves what educational work actually looked like within the women's movement and among women in general.

In the report, published in 1946, *Educational Activities in Women's Organisations* (Widhe, 1946), two main reasons were given for this investigation. On the one hand, there had been many complaints that women in general were not very active in educational work. The idea was to see how true these accusations were and what should be done to increase the interest where it was weak. On the other hand, the

investigators wanted to shed light on women's special educational issues, as these were often ignored in discussions regarding general education. In summary, the women's organisations quite simply wished to bring the issue of women's educational efforts to the attention of the governmental commission on popular education to prevent its being neglected and rendered invisible in the commission's report.

The investigator's report is interesting because it is the only comprehensive study ever undertaken of the educational activities within women's organisations. The report makes it clear that women pursued extensive educational work through their organisations, but that this was often done under difficult conditions, resulting from insufficient economic resources and a lack of educated teachers. The investigators pointed to a need for considerably greater interest on the part of the government, as well as increased government subsidies. They also demanded a greater influence from women in the shaping of free educational work in general. Despite difficulties in getting statistics from the various women's organisations, the investigators established that there had been a dramatic increase in women's educational work since the early 1930s. But, it was claimed, the lack of funding was now hampering continued growth, as the organisations could not manage to train a sufficient number of leaders and create study materials designed to include women of limited economic means. The report stated that if the general education and continuous further education of women were to be regarded as a fundamental human right, as much support as possible was needed from the state and municipalities.

The investigation included lecture activities arranged through central federations or by local associations, courses, correspondence teaching and study circle activities. The primary emphasis was on study circles, which were considered to be the most important form of studies because they reached out the furthest and provided those interested in studying with opportunities to gain in-depth knowledge together with others. Moreover, they worked well for those who were not accustomed to studying or who lived out in the countryside or in remote parts of the country. Educational work had to be anchored in the immediate surroundings, in everyday life. When their own problems stemming from the on-going crisis, population issues and nutritional matters were placed in the foreground of world politics, when the everyday problems of motherhood, homemaking and sexual policies were placed in their universal contexts, then women became interested in politics, according

to the report. The greatest strength of the study circle lay in the fact that the transmission of knowledge was made personal.

Above all it was middle-aged or older married homemakers who took part in the educational activities of women's organisations, a striking difference compared with male-controlled study associations, according to the investigators. What was needed, therefore, were new ways of reaching those who, because of children or their work, found it difficult to get away. But it was also necessary to persuade those in control of the public purse strings to make further commitments to older women whose active occupational life was completed. Overall, the investigators regarded innovative thinking about the work for women's general education as necessary if more women were to be reached.

Educational work, from the earliest period of the women's movement, had focused on elementary school subjects because general school education of women was still so poor. But apace with improvements in elementary education for women and with women's new status as fully fledged citizens, other demands were placed on education for citizenship and general education, according to the investigators, which meant that social and existential questions had successively come to occupy an ever greater place in educational activities. What is more, the ever greater emphasis on the significance of homemaking, with its modernisation, rationalisation and evolution meant that subjects related to this had become central, not only in the educational activities of the Housewives' League but also those within the other organisations. The report concluded from the latter that homemakers were beginning to conceive of homemaking as a profession in which it was important to attain knowledge in order to strengthen the home and their position as practitioners of this profession.

The commentaries in the report underline the interest in the role of the homemaker that peaked in the latter half of the 1940s. The vision of the homemaker ideology was to create a competent, efficient and technology-friendly homemaker, and this was not seen as contradictory to the women's liberation project. Instead, the efficient homemaker began to be seen as a new ideal woman, a model for modern women – this was also the case within women's organisations like the Fredrika Bremer Association (Manns, 1997).

Certain courses had also, according to the report, been prompted by the contemporary political situation, with the special problems of the war and the economic crisis. For example, the courses 'The Swedish

Form of Life' and 'Women and Democratic Government' had become very popular, reaching many participants. Weaving courses and weaving workshops had been arranged as an expression of the need for practical creativity, while sewing workshops and mending centres were more a consequence of the hard times.

It is interesting that these women investigators brought practical activities to the fore, as state subsidies for educational activities at this time were only geared to providing *books* for study circle libraries. This support was based on a narrow conception of popular education that focused only on 'bookish' education and not on any practically oriented educational activities.

What did the women's organisations wish for the future? One strong desire from many organisations was for practically oriented courses in English. Many women wanted to learn languages. There was also a desire for better opportunities to develop practical/aesthetic educational activities, and it was asserted that there should be opportunities for self-expression through artistic activities which, it was claimed in the report, also stimulated and developed the intellect and sense of the general. In other words, the women's organisations' strategy to get a larger slice of the governmental pie was to demand a broadening of the concept of popular education when subsidies were distributed. In this way, activities that attracted many women, but were currently not eligible for subsidies, could be supported.

## **The 1947 reform of support for popular education**

The governmental commission on popular education submitted its first report in 1946, and with this document as a basis, a parliamentary bill was written, which was adopted by the Swedish Parliament in 1947. In 1948 another report was presented that addressed aesthetic educational efforts in greater detail.

The commission on popular education led to a major change in conditions for free educational work and, as the grand old man of Swedish popular education, Gösta Vestlund, puts it, has come to be regarded as the Magna Carta of popular education. Four concepts constituted the pillars of the activities of study associations: democracy, culture, civic education and personal development. Moreover, the report helped broaden the concept of general education in line with the demands of the women's organisations. From having focused on bookish

educational work, it now placed practical and aesthetic educational work on an equal footing. Enrolments for popular education also increased dramatically. The state subsidy, in the form of books for study circle libraries, was replaced by a cash allocation directly to the study circles, and the funding for administration was increased substantially. An Adult Education Division of the National Board of Education was established to oversee popular education activities and to allocate state subsidies. Furthermore, an advisory National Adult Education Committee was established to serve as an investigative office before decisions were taken by the National Board of Education. The committee included representatives of all organisations entitled to state subsidies for popular education, both study associations and other organisations such as the Federation of Lecturing Societies, the Swedish Union for Folk High School Teachers and the Swedish Library Association (Vestlund, 1996). The roster of members reveals that the National Adult Education Committee was an exclusively male entity. Not one of the 28 regular members appointed by the various organisations in 1948 was a woman. In fact its minutes contain no comments by a woman throughout its entire existence, up to 1964. The discussion about popular education and state support for it remained a purely male concern.

The new and improved conditions for popular education in 1947 prompted more organisations to establish their own study associations. Three independent women's organisations, the Fredrika Bremer Association, the Housewives' League and the Swedish Women's Voluntary Defence Organisation, expressed an interest in being accredited as national associations for study circle activities, and in 1946–1947 they formed their own study associations.

In the rather detailed minutes kept by the National Adult Education Committee from 1948 to 1964 it is possible to study its deliberations regarding the approval of new study associations. The discussion was at its most intense during the early years. Here we find that both the National Board of Education and the members of the National Adult Education Committee were sceptical when it came to letting in more study associations among those already accepted. An often-recurring reason is that they did not want to spread their resources too thinly. It could also be expressed as those who had already received their portion did not want to share the pie with others. However, the approval of the Liberal Study Association in 1948 shows that party political considerations were acceptable justifications. The National Board of

Education had already approved as many as three religious-based study associations, and there were also two distinct temperance-based study associations. But no interest was shown in accepting gender-based organisations. At the committee's inaugural meeting in January 1948, a few members ventured the opinion that there could be one women's study association. What they primarily had in mind was the Housewives' League. On the other hand, no one appeared to be in favour of allowing several women's study associations. Others were opposed to women's study associations in general. 'It would be unfortunate if we had a special study association for women. Work with general education seems to have become fashionable, something one does to acquire the respect of others', stated member and secretary of the Social-Democratic Party Board, Member of Parliament Adolf Wallentheim. The decision was to shelve applications from women's organisations until the following year (NA, minutes 07/01/1948).

The Housewives' League never got as far as submitting a formal application. In the discussion regarding applications from the Fredrika Bremer Association and the Swedish Women's Voluntary Defence Organisation in 1949, the director of studies of the Workers' Study Association, the well-known popular educator Gunnar Hirdman, maintained that it was hard to find reasons why women needed to form their own study associations, and his fellow Social-Democrat Wallentheim averred that organisations for popular education needed to show their mettle in terms of both self-discipline and responsibility and promote the idea of cooperation. 'There have been too many tendencies towards splintering in women's issues and other matters.' The vote was unanimous in rejecting the applications of women's study associations. The official reason was that their educational activities were too limited (NA, minutes 24/08/1949).

Researcher in education Joyce Stalker, sees men's attitudes throughout the history of adult education as a misogynist response to women's educational work, consisting of reification, vilification and subjugation (Stalker, 1998) and there is no doubt that the Swedish institutionalised popular education also suffered from this. In the National Adult Education Committee, women's educational work was never discussed between 1948 and 1964 apart from the few occasions when concrete applications had to be addressed. In this assemblage of men there quite simply did not seem to be any interest in women's educational efforts or in how these might be supported, and there was no desire to see any new

study associations, especially not any based on separate organisations for women. The entire matter of women's educational work was rendered invisible and in principle vanished from the agenda.

### **The development during the last part of the twentieth century**

In the mid-1950s the requirements for study associations to receive state subsidies were tightened. In practice this meant that no new organisations could be considered for accreditation as study associations, as it was impossible for them on their own to undertake the volume of educational work required to qualify for a subsidy. In other words, the organisational structure had been cemented in place. Existing associations could maintain their level of work with state support and no longer risked having to share the pie with new organisations.

The consequence of decisions taken by the National Adult Education Committee and the National Board of Education in the late 1940s and early 1950s was therefore that no study associations were formed with roots in the women's movement, meaning that we have never seen a study association organised separately for women. In other words, organised popular education has been based on the principle of heteronormativity – i.e., that it is correct and natural for men and women to cooperate in joint organisations and institutions – which the political scientist Maud Eduards assigns to established Swedish democracy in general (Eduards, 2002). None of the women's organisations that tried to form their own study associations in the 1940s to qualify for state subsidies joined an existing study association instead, although the Housewives' League later established a cooperative agreement with one of them.<sup>2</sup>

The most important consequence for women of the 1944 commission on popular education became the extension of the concept of popular education that made it possible to receive governmental subsidies for more practically oriented educational work. Therefore, activities that appealed to women but had previously not been defined as popular education by the state were now entitled to state support. The consequence of this change was that women began to flock to study association activities at a rapidly accelerating pace, and since the end of the 1940s women constitute the majority of study circle participants. To a great extent women became involved in practical/aesthetic activities, although in recent years a change has been discernible (Proposition

2005/06:192; Rydbeck, 2001). The large number of women in study associations' activities has been interpreted as meaning that the interests of women have been well provided for after all.

It is probable that study associations, in their textile handicraft circles, have contributed to an important revaluation of traditional women's work and spheres of interest. But at the same time the massive commitment to this type of activity has meant that in institutionalised popular education, women have been virtually exclusively involved in activities closely tied to their traditional gender role. Although textile study circles have often constituted single-gender settings in practice, where participants have not only sewed, knitted and woven but no doubt also addressed a number of other issues relating to women's everyday lives, it can hardly be claimed that study associations, through their specific emphasis on women's educational work, have provided incentives for change in the fundamental gender order. It should, however, also be pointed out here that the women's organisations' definition of the concept of women's citizenship, primarily in the first half of the twentieth century and by their actions in the mid-1940s, when they both applied pressure to broaden the concept of popular education and also to comprehend practically oriented activities and emphasised more homemaker-oriented educational activities with the goal of professionalising the role of the homemaker, contributed to this development.

Today there are ten fully accredited study associations. Most of them have member organisations and cooperative partners at national level. Here too though, it must be pointed out that most of them also have local members and cooperative partners which include women's organisations. Information collected from the study associations' websites and information officers in September 2011 reveals that an extremely small number of women's organisations are national members or cooperative partners of any study association, except for the political women's auxiliaries that chose from the outset to join the same educational association as their parent parties. It should also be noted that neither of the two entirely new study associations formed in the last decade have any women's organisations whatsoever as members at national level.

The Swedish state has long remained passive in regard to the unwillingness of institutionalised popular education to confront gender issues. However, the matter was taken up in a governmental evaluation of popular education presented in 2004, *Popular Education in Times of Change* (Folkbildning i brytningstid, 2004). At the same time, the

Swedish National Council of Adult Education, which oversees popular education and allocates state subsidies since 1991, held a conference within institutionalised popular education that resulted in the report *Prospects for Popular Education* (Folkbildningens framsyn, 2004), which was intended to present an overall picture to the government of the role and tasks of popular education as we approached the 2010s. The gender issue was addressed here:

*Popular education with features of civic education must contribute to greater gender equality in society so that men and women can actively take part on equal terms in shaping the society of the future. Structural inequality must be identified and combatted, not only in theory but also in practical activities with the participants, as in the organisations involved in popular education themselves* (Folkbildningens framsyn, 2004).

The result was that the governmental bill on popular education that was passed by the Swedish Parliament in 2006, *Learn, Grow, Change* (Proposition 2005/06:192. Lära, växa, förändra), formulated demands for greater awareness regarding gender issues in the structure of popular education organisations as well as the content and nature of their activities. For the first time the government brought forward the issue of gender – together with issues of ethnicity and functional impairment – for discussion from a democratic perspective. It stated that popular education must not be controlled solely by ‘Swedish-born, well-educated, middle-aged men’ (Proposition 2005/06:192, p. 27). In the revision of the Decree on Government Subsidies to Popular Education, a clause was inserted in section 2 that equality between the sexes must be a priority area of activity in the allocation of state support (Förordning om statsbidrag till folkbildningen, SFS 1991:977, ändrad SFS 2006:1499).

However, in the follow-up to *Prospects for Popular Education* carried out by the Swedish National Council of Adult Education in 2011, which resulted in a discussion platform for the future role of popular education, the gender issue is not addressed at all. It merely established that participation in study circle activities is declining and that this trend is especially apparent among women. Only one third of women involved in study circle activities in the study associations today are under the age of 45 (Folkbildningens vägval och vilja, 2011). The follow-up therefore does not indicate any great interest in gender issues.

## **Final discussion: The two avenues for women's free educational work**

On the whole it can be maintained that the concept of citizenship for women that has been formulated in practice in the activities of the Swedish study associations has been tied to the prevailing gender order and never constituted any real attempt to challenge it – despite the fundamental emancipatory purpose of popular education. Women have been permitted to define their own educational needs only to the extent that they accorded with the norms of the prevailing gender system and to the extent that women accepted the overarching power of men in study associations. It should, therefore, be questioned whether study associations actively contributed in their activities to provide women participants with tools to develop their opportunities for political influence, to advance their positions and to change society on their own terms. I would assert that the patriarchal ideal of general education that characterised the early educational initiatives of the nineteenth century from a class perspective has survived well into our own day if one considers popular education from a gender perspective.

The women's movement has related to the male-controlled structures of institutionalised popular education in two ways. Some organisations, primarily the political women's auxiliaries, accepted the heteronormative thinking from the outset and integrated themselves into these structures. But the great majority of women's organisations, above all the independent ones, chose to stand outside and have, therefore, never affiliated themselves to any of the mixed-gender study associations. Mention should be made here of the women's peace movement, a number of important church-based women's organisations, the entire women's movement of the 1970s, the Swedish Nursing Mother's Support Group, numerous women's immigrant organisations, many trade union and professional organisations with a female profile and the national associations of women's shelters. They have defended their right to carry on educational activities without having to adapt to the norms of male-controlled organisations. They have created a room of their own for popular education. However, they have very often made use of ways of working that are associated with study associations. The Women's College for Civic Training at Fogelstad was mentioned earlier. The study circle method was used by women's organisations already in the interwar period and played a highly central role in the women's movement of the

1970s. The movement's most seminal organisation, Group 8, started as a study circle in Stockholm and then spread rapidly with the formation of new study circles elsewhere in the country (Schmitz, 2007). One of the first 'Eights', Gunnel Granlid, states that:

*Struggle and learn. That was an old slogan in the earliest days of the labour movement. And that is how we started, we eight women from different environments who had grown weary of the oppression of women and wanted to do something about it. We realized that we needed to find out what mechanisms made women subordinated to men in most contexts. . . . We quite simply formed a study circle. We read everything we could find from Engels and Rosa Luxemburg to Simone de Beauvoir, Ellen Key and Alva Myrdal. At the same time we wrote debate articles, submitted comments on commission reports, including the important abortion commission (Granlid, 2010).*

Study work clearly stands out as a hub around which activities circled, judging from the accounts published in recent years on activities in the women's movement of the 1970s in Sweden (Schmitz, 2007; Sillen *et al.*, 2010; Thorgren, 2003; Witt-Brattström, 2010).

Some of the local study activities, both in the 1970s women's movement and later, have without doubt benefited from organisational support from local branches of established male-controlled study associations. But there can be little doubt that a great deal of the educational activities that explicitly set out to question the prevailing gender order, to stimulate women to change their positions and take an active part in how society is formed – in short, to develop into active citizens with an interest in how democratic society can be advanced in terms of gender perspective – in practice were found *outside* institutionalised popular education. Either it was considered too provocative to be accommodated there, or women themselves have chosen exclusion in order to defend their right to define their own educational needs and formulate an alternative concept of women's citizenship. However, the upshot has been that this educational work has not been counted as 'real' popular education. It has been rendered invisible and forced to survive under considerably more difficult economic conditions than otherwise. From a democratic point of view the economic price has been high, as the institutions for popular education receive such generous subsidies. In 2011, the Swedish National Council of Adult Education handed

out some €348,000,000 in state subsidies for study associations and folk high schools (Facts on folkbildning, 2011). On top of this there are grants from municipalities and county councils, which in 2010 amounted to about €124,000,000 (Komunernas och landstingens bidrag till studieförbund och folkhögskolor, 2010). Those organisations who voluntarily or involuntarily wound up outside the structures of popular education have received only a few crumbs from this pie – but at the same time they have been able to more easily protect ‘free’ educational work in the sense of being free from outside control.

## Notes

- 1 This is a reworked and updated article from a study published in Swedish (Rydbeck, 2006), titled ‘Ett eget rum för folkbildning?’ (A Room of One’s Own for Popular Education?).
- 2 Study associations and their members up to 1980 are found in Andersson (1980). Johansson (1986) provides an account of members in the mid-1980s. Information about the current situation was acquired in September 2011 from the associations’ websites and through contact with information officers.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

# Folk high schools as educational avant-gardes in Sweden

*Staffan Larsson*

## The establishment of folk high schools in Sweden

Folk high schools are one of several new forms of education, which established themselves outside of the formal school system at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Also, study circles, popular libraries, distance education and public lectures emerged during this intensive period of innovation aimed at educating ‘the broader layers of the people’ (Svenska Akademins ordbok, 1925). The folk high schools – the first in Sweden started in 1868 – made education possible beyond primary level (in Sweden called folk schools), which was made compulsory in 1842. The folk high schools quickly became popular – in 1900 there were 29 and new ones have continually been added – there are formally 150 in 2011.

The folk high school idea was imported to Sweden from Denmark. The first school was started in 1842 in Rendsburg in Holstein, one of three duchies ruled by the Danish king, by actors within the German-speaking group. The inspiration came from a civil servant, Klenze, who represented enlightenment ideas, and the aim was to increase knowledge among young farmers as a preparation for political representation in local government, but also to prepare them for modern farming (Tengberg, 1968, p. 46; Zeuner, 2010, pp. 57–79). It was followed two years later by a school in Rödding, further north in the mixed language duchy of

Slesvig, by a Danish nationalist association. Grundtvig, who is always referred to in relation to the Danish folk high school movement was not involved in its inception, according to contemporary research. However, he gave it support as a nationalist politician who celebrated the farmers as representatives for a pure Danish-speaking population (Korsgaard, 1997, p. 145). Grundtvig was originally an antirationalist theologian, who confronted the Lutheran state-church by launching the view that the sound basis for the faith was the people's faith in the apostles' creed and not the academic clergy: the 'living word' instead of books. There is a democratic tendency here as well as an antiestablishment message, which has been attractive to various political groups, but his influence has been strongest among farmers. Many Danish folk high schools were started during a period of strong nationalist feelings, when Grundtvig's views became popular, celebrating the Danish language and the farmers, who according to his views, had escaped the evils of rationalism, urbanism and materialism. His romantic nationalist-Christian view was in conflict at this time with the cultural radicals and some decades later with Socialists in terms of beliefs in rationality, internationalism, science and secular enlightenment. Grundtvig was an exponent of the early nineteenth century nationalistic romantic views about nation and folk, based in a shared culture, language and history. In that sense he celebrated sameness through common language rather than class, and cultural homogeneity rather than cultural hybridism, something which has been picked up by the contemporary Danish extreme right (Wind, 2003, pp. 19–20, 145).

The first Swedish folk high schools were started more than 25 years after the first one in Rendsburg. The example of existing folk high schools in Denmark seems to have been the inspiration, not Grundtvig's philosophy (Tengberg, 1968, pp. 63–89; Korsgaard, 1997, pp. 204–208). One context was the rise in political power among the prosperous farmers. Their interests were, from the start, at the forefront – some argued for the name 'farmers' high school'. A brochure about the purpose of the first school indicated the curriculum: preparing for the farmers' new political position and agriculture but also teaching skills in speech and writing to help act independently in legal matters (Tengberg, 1968, p. 99). There was also a promise that there would be no homework. The initiators were, on the whole, prominent farmers. One concern was to keep their sons from leaving the farms for other occupations. The freedom from formal exams, which was typical, can

be understood in that context: the sons did not need an exam to return to the farm, but rather needed useful knowledge. Some of the initiators were members of the parliament where they could act for the new institution. They received significant financial support and soon became a concern of the county councils, a stronghold for farmers at this time. The county councils took control of most folk high schools during the nineteenth century (Swensson, 1968, pp. 140, 200–205). Already during the nineteenth century they were often appreciated by those in political power. It was not until workers and Social Democrats entered the folk high schools as students at the beginning of the twentieth century that effective resistance from the conservative government became significant. Teachers in the first schools were academics or engineers. Scientific farming was growing in importance and therefore the curriculum was science orientated. Religion was not a subject, but was present in the background, for example, nature did not only follow scientific laws, but also God's plan. The curriculum seems, in spite of this, to have been more favourable to the French enlightenment than to Grundtvig's national romantic antirationalistic views. Nationalism was certainly part of teaching in history, but leading figures in the Swedish folk high schools often found Grundtvig too extreme. The class-base was the same in Denmark, but the Swedes seemed to be more focused on material usefulness and less on ideology. The Swedish and Danish folk high schools, therefore, had a family resemblance, but also differed in significant ways from the start.

## **Point of departure**

In this chapter, the folk high schools will be discussed from the perspective of the interplay between folk high schools and the changes in society on one hand and the interplay between the formal school system and the folk high schools on the other. Bernstein argues that education is not completely parallel to the organisation of society, but there is rather a contradictory relation, or one of semi-independence, between society and how education is organised (Bernstein, 1977). Each form of education is institutionalised and tends to differ from others, each marked by their specific history. A key aspect of the institutionalisation is inertia, i.e. schools can conserve curricula in spite of major changes in society (Tyack and Tobin, 1994). The focus on classic languages in grammar schools, when these languages are not in use any more in any

significant way is a striking example. Cuban points out that teaching changes, but very slowly, in an empirical investigation of teaching in American classrooms over more than a century (Cuban, 1993). On the other hand societies change, sometimes dramatically. The dominating material basis for the majority in Sweden was farming at the end of the nineteenth century, industry in the middle of the twentieth century and services at the start of the twenty-first century. At the beginning of the twentieth century there was still a struggle for a formal democracy with an equal vote and married women had to obey their husbands according to the law. The issue here is how such grand societal changes can be mirrored in education, concentrating on folk high schools.

My contribution aims at presenting more of a history about the 'structures of everyday life' in education and the societal forces behind these than one about ideas. It is about who participates and what they learn. Neither is it a story about great men, but about collectives of students and folk high school functionaries. A general theme in the text is how different social classes and groups create, use or change educational institutions. It is about farmers and workers and women. They can act as initiators of folk high schools, but also as participants, who will change the trajectory of the institution by their numbers and interest, sometimes experienced as a colonisation by ideologues within. My prime sources are statistics and other researchers' investigations of primary sources, which have been necessary in order to give an overview. I have often checked with several sources where these have been available.

Braudel's work on the formation of various aspects of structures in everyday life, where women and men are 'more than half sunk down' (1988, p. 10) in material life, have been an inspiration by giving a broad overview, pointing at fundamental material circumstances for societal change and yet grounded in the empirical facts of material life (Braudel, 1981). When trying to give a broad overview of society and its relation to educational institutions, it has been my aim to point out how the material changes of life have effects on social groups, their quantity, their power and what kind of activities they are seen as suited for. Actors operate on and are shaped by the specific societal and material conditions of their time. The interpretation is based on a view that educational institutions are formed by the pupils and students, who take independent action in various ways to, as it were, 'negotiate' or 'colonize' the institutions in their interests (Larsson, 1983; 1993) as well as those who are formally in power, like school authorities or teachers. The long-

term change might partly be understood as sleepwalking, since it was structured by the total effect of relevant actors' intentions, habits and sometimes struggles against each other.

There are some broad concepts presented, which further shape my interpretation. Democratisation of education is an issue in the text. Four dimensions of equality are fundamental: social class, gender, region and age. In order to identify fundamental aspects of education I have borrowed a structure from the continental tradition of 'didactics', where a number of questions define education. Three such questions structure the interpretation: who should be allowed to study, what is appropriate to study and what kind of educational process is suitable?

## **Theses**

My article is somewhat unusual by operating with three theses, which I want to discuss in relation to empirical evidence. That folk high schools have changed very much is well supported by evidence in terms of who they recruit, what they teach and to some extent how they teach. The identity of the folk high schools as a form of education is moving in its struggle to renegotiate its place in a society which is constantly changing and an educational system which sooner or later follows. The issue of identity has, in Sweden, dominated research about '*folkbildning*' – popular education. My contribution here is to discuss empirical evidence which might undermine propositions of a common meaning or identity. In an earlier version I came to the conclusion that one can rather linger with the paradox that change is a tradition for folk high schools in Sweden. However, my general interest concerns the tempo of change and the mechanisms behind it, as it can be discerned in the history of the Swedish folk high schools, as an example.

1. The first thesis is that the folk high schools change faster than the ordinary school system, in terms of what is taught, how the forms of study are designed and which societal groups attend. In the last case we can look for class, gender, geographical origin and age.

The next two theses are about possible mechanisms behind that change:

2. Folk high schools have been innovative, not only in themselves, but also in relation to the Swedish education system generally.

Primary and secondary schools have often had a role in receiving or taking over what has been developed in folk high schools in the first instance. One might say that the folk high school has been an avant-garde in education.<sup>2</sup>

3. The last thesis is about the dialectic relationship between the folk high schools and the ordinary school system. It seems as if the folk high schools not only develop various new educational initiatives – when the school system appropriates these, folk high schools lose their monopoly and have often to invent new practices. Folk high schools are therefore particularly under recurring pressure to change. In order to sustain, they have had to reorientate themselves on several occasions.

Here, one reservation should immediately be highlighted. Folk high schools also contain retrospective and conserving features, like administrative structures, sometimes adapting to other educational institutions' entrance requirements. Folk high schools have generally not been avant-garde in a political sense. The links, support and use by political organisations have been rather diverse through their history. During the first half century they had a relatively broad support from the political elite, i.e. county councils and parliament, where the prosperous farmers had a dominating role, due to the system where prosperity gave many votes at elections. It took quite a long time until folk high schools established a relationship to the emerging workers' movement, and when workers and socialist teachers showed up in a few schools in the first decade of the twentieth century the general attitude was hostile. However, in the period between the wars both the working class and their political representatives became users and supporters of folk high schools. The resulting political diversity was also supported by emerging links to popular movements and other organisations from the early twentieth century and beyond. 19 per cent of the members of the parliament in 1967 had studied at folk high schools, mostly from the Social Democrats, but there were also many from the Centre Party, a party originally representing the farmers (Helldén, 1968, pp. 61, 74). The radical wave, which started in the late 1960s manifested itself rather strongly in many folk high schools (Roselius, 2011). However, my theses are about folk high schools being an *educational avant-garde*, i.e. *educational innovation* of the Swedish educational system is to a great extent a part of the history of the folk high school tradition.

## **Literacy before schools became obligatory**

Until the introduction of a compulsory elementary school in 1842, only an extremely small group of people had access to schools. Prior to this it was regulated as early as 1686 so that the whole population should learn the Lutheran Catechism and be able to read the Bible. The vicars examined everyone and reading and writing abilities were recorded. The ability to read had already reached rather high levels in the late seventeenth century, while the ability to write was developed somewhat later (Johansson, 1993). It was a case of religious indoctrination, but also of fostering obedience. However, reading and writing skills were also useful when there was a religious and political opposition in the nineteenth century against the state, the church and an unequal society. When the popular movements bloomed in the latter part of the same century, these skills gave rich resources to gain knowledge, but also to be effective in changing society. It also meant that improving literacy was not an important task in the popular movements. Here we can notice a partial metamorphosis in the consequences of the catechistic curriculum, when society changes.

## **A counterbalance to the cities' monopoly on education**

The establishment of the elementary school was an expansion of schooling, even if it did not add very much to knowledge that already existed, with its focus on basic skills and Lutheran faith. Further education was only available to a very small group who attended grammar schools and the growing number of girls' schools, primarily in the cathedral cities. When the folk high schools were introduced in the late 1800s, it was clear that the reason was to satisfy the demands of the well-to-do farmer class for education. The folk high schools recruited primarily farmers' sons (Berndtsson, 2000). Here, a type of school arose that worked 'for and through' the farmer class elite. The schools were located in the countryside and spread quickly to all parts of the country, which breached a geographical 'recruitment barrier' that was prevalent at this time. At the end of the 1800s, grammar schools recruited their pupils predominantly from the town in which they were located. During the period 1876–1909, local pupils accounted for between 68 and 79 per cent of all the pupils attending the first class at lower secondary

school (Kungl. Ecklesiastikdepartementet, 1915). Both girls' schools and grammar schools recruited their pupils from the cities' middle classes; businessmen, craftsmen and civil servants dominated.<sup>3</sup> Today, it is easy to forget that 7/8 of the population lived in the countryside when the folk high school was introduced in 1868 and in 1900 it was still 79 per cent. The establishment of folk high schools was a counterbalance to an extreme regional inequality in access to education. This difference between town and countryside remained until the introduction of the nine-year compulsory schooling after the Second World War and the establishment of the modern upper secondary school in the 1960s. The folk high school took the lead in countering regional inequality and the public school system followed. It took at least 80 years before an ambition to achieve change was realised outside popular education.

During the nineteenth century, however, the folk high school was not an equal school from a class perspective – the countryside's 'broad mass' of landless peasants and smallholders were probably not very frequent participants.

## New kinds of curriculum introduced

The folk high school was a vanguard in another sense – when introduced it expanded the limits of the curriculum, what could be studied and how. One such innovation was training in how to act in the municipalities and democratic associations. The training for the political role of farmers was constantly an argument when founders mobilised support for starting a folk high school (Tengberg, 1968). Simulation of actual political decision-making in municipalities was a matter of introducing a fresh new way of acting in the classroom, concrete and also with a stress on students' active participation (Berndtsson, 2000). One can see a trace of the Age of Enlightenment's plea for practical utility and social relevance instead of the retrospective idealism, which, in the grammar schools, often took the form of grammar exercises based on texts about the virtues of Greek and Roman soldiers in pre-Christian times.<sup>4</sup> Through this practical schooling, the practice of democratic decision-making could be established as a well-known routine by these students when they returned home and often became political actors. A new Act in the 1860s, on representation in the parliament, with a graded right to vote based on income and wealth, gave more prosperous farm-owners considerable power, based on the fact that there were many with

some wealth in their farms. Changes in local government legislation at the same time had a similar effect. The folk high school curriculum also became very useful later when the working class emerged as students and grasped political power.

Secondly, scientific farming became an important subject in the early phase of the folk high school history. It has been pointed out that the emerging curriculum was polytechnic, where the intention was to bridge the divide between education and vocational training (Ginner, 1988, pp. 20–22). Farmers' sons were equipped with knowledge for all aspects of their future life as farmers, politicians and often as persons with some ambition in cultural issues. The usefulness of the school was obviously seen in a context that differed from previous forms of schooling. The focus was on the farmers' needs during the early phase of the folk high schools.

Also, in terms of classroom climate and the social relations between students and teachers something new was introduced. Folk high schools were normally boarding schools and time after classes was often used for organised social and cultural activities. There were no examinations or grades. An ideology developed where the folk high school was likened to a family with the rector and his wife as parents. In this way it was a paternalistic, but soft regime. Former participants have routinely reported the strong positive feelings they have towards their school – also in present times (Paldanius, 2003). This was new in a Swedish context, where obedience and sometimes hostility between teachers and pupils were commonplace in the elementary as well as the grammar school.

We can note that the folk high schools broke new ground, but that they eventually also lost some of their activities once these were introduced into the mainstream education system. Scientific farming acquired an identity of its own in the agricultural college, which separated itself from the folk high schools over a long period. Initially it had a separate second year, later it also became an institution with its own recruitment. The separation meant that the folk high school lost an activity which it had itself developed. As a result, the polytechnic feature of the folk high school disappeared. The practical, social science curriculum was picked up by parts of the formal school system, even though this took a very long time. It was probably not until the mid-twentieth century's school reforms, when American progressivism became influential, that contemporary society was made a general concern at secondary school

level. In this way the folk high schools' 'monopoly' on training for political positions disappeared.

The loss of a direct relationship to farming in the curriculum might on the other hand have paved the way for making folk high schools attractive to other social classes. Some years into the twentieth century, the hegemony of farmer sons as participants began to erode.

## **Workers break class barriers**

During the nineteenth century workers had practically no educational options apart from elementary school, neither in folk high schools nor in the grammar or girls' schools in the towns. Lecture associations and workers' institutes opened their doors to everybody. In the early twentieth century study circles emerged in the workers' and temperance movements, but more in depth studies were still unattainable for workers. However, workers were eventually accepted in some folk high schools. This broadening of the concept of who was supposed to be a student did not take place without conflict. The end of the hegemony of the farmers' class reflects a shift in power in society as a whole. The end of the nineteenth century saw the swan song of societal domination based on land ownership. As we have seen, farmers had acquired a stronger position from the middle of the nineteenth century, while the large landowners in the aristocracy who had previously had a hegemonic position became, relatively speaking, weaker. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the classes of the industrial society gradually assumed leading positions. Some years into the new century, we can see how representatives of the working class and owners of industry became key figures in the battles and compromises involving power in society.

The folk high schools were, at the beginning, on the losing side, as with their background among farmers they were part of the rural mainstream elite, politically conservative or liberal. However, as they were open to students who had only attended elementary school, workers were not excluded by lacking entrance qualifications. At the beginning of the twentieth century, an increasing number of workers turned to them (Krantz, 1998, pp. 299–301; Möller, 1990, pp. 41, 49–51). This was not without controversy, but workers continued to grow in numbers and folk high schools had to survive by recruiting those who were willing to attend.

One could perhaps say that it was more a case of the workers finding

the schools than the schools themselves actively appealing to the workers. Nevertheless, the process resulted in workers being accepted and it became in practice the main route for workers into education beyond elementary level (correspondence education, e.g., engineering, later became another useful option). The folk high schools thus broke new ground by crossing a class barrier – education was no longer exclusively focused on an urban or rural middle class. This change was relatively rapid – workers being rare in the folk schools in the early 1900s, while Berndtsson notes that ‘nearly half the participants in the winter courses in 1932/33 came from the working class’ (2000, p. 103). The government contributed by giving increased financial support for increased numbers of study places. Due to the economic depression, 42 per cent of the students were actually unemployed 1933/34 (Lundh Nilsson, 2010, p. 108). The agrarian background was, in spite of this change, still strongly represented among the students. It can thus be concluded that the vast majority of the students during this period had either a working class or an agricultural background, i.e. a background with a personal experience of physical labour. This is in sharp contrast to the grammar and girls’ schools. The folk high schools were for a long period the only educational institutions, after elementary school, where pupils who came from the majority did not constitute a marginalised group.

However, as a result of the school reforms during the 1960s and 1970s, the folk high school gradually lost the ‘monopoly’ of the recruitment base it had developed among workers and farmers. There was a gradual process of reforms of the ordinary school system during several decades guided by a vision of educational equality: an obligatory comprehensive school replacing the lower secondary school, a municipal adult education offering the equivalent of formal secondary schooling to the same groups as had been participating in folk high schools. Later it became a fact that the integrated upper secondary school recruited almost all young people after they had completed the obligatory comprehensive school.

In this way, the folk high school can be seen as an educational avant-garde in relation to these reforms in terms of social, but also regional and gender equality. The folk high school pioneered these reforms over many decades. It was not only a question of a formal opportunity to compete for the study places, but educational equality in results (Härnqvist, 1989). One reason for this was probably the control in boards and in political

decision-making by people who represented social strata other than the urban elites but also that individuals from the working-class saw the folk high schools as an opportunity to get access to education – they ‘colonised’ the schools. The ‘farming curriculum’ gradually faded away and the percentage of time which was allocated to general, rather than vocational, education increased rather sharply from the middle of the 1920s and came close to 60 per cent at the end of the 1930s. (Lundh Nilsson, 2010, p. 102).

## **Women enter**

Women had always been considered by the rulers of society to be unsuitable for studies other than what was needed for their moral upbringing such as learning the Lutheran catechism. Then came the elementary school, but apart from this, there was still little offered for women. In the mid-1800s the education of midwives and female primary school teachers was initiated. The girls’ schools, which gave girls a general education at lower secondary school level, grew quickly at the end of the nineteenth century. They were intended for the daughters of the urban middle class (Kyle and Herrström, 1972, p. 64). We can note that these activities were based on the sexes being separated (Rydbeck, 2001, p. 14). It is also striking that they provided education for a role in society where women were subordinate both in the labour market and in the home. A gender order based on a separation of sexes and the subordination of women was systemic.

However, we can note that the folk high schools accepted female students early on. The Danish folk high school pioneer, Kristian Kold, opened his folk high school ‘every summer for adult young girls’ (Nordisk familjebok, volume 8, 1908, p. 755). During the nineteenth century, women were relatively rare as students. One exception was courses specifically for women who were trained for work in dairies, which started in 1872 (Lundh Nilsson, 2010, p. 100). After 1895 these courses were changed and recruited mainly men. The entry into folk high schools for women on a larger scale was instead for summer courses, usually lasting about three months. The content and sometimes the statements of intent hint that these were for both general and vocational education, i.e. training for the future wives of farmers (Hartman, 1993, pp. 51–53). The summer courses can be seen as a shorter equivalent for the rural ‘middle class’ of the girls’ schools in urban areas. The gender

order was a preparation for a gender-divided everyday life that was separated and patriarchal.

The success of the summer courses meant that women were in a majority before the outbreak of the Second World War (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 1941, p. 288). In terms of study hours it took until the middle of the 1920s before women students outnumbered men (Lundh Nilsson, 2010, p. 98). In the 1920s, the number of women attending the lengthier courses, the so-called winter courses, increased sharply (Hartman, 1993, p. 91). As a result of these courses increasingly being open to both sexes – 33 of 53 schools offered winter courses for both sexes in 1928 (Hartman, 1989, p. 54) – women were in the majority in the first, second and third years of the winter courses by 1939/40 (Berndtsson, 2000, p. 105). We can see how the ‘principle of separation’ applying to what was studied at the folk high schools began to be applied less rigidly during the interwar period, when women became a common sight at the winter courses. This change also mirrors the aims of women to get salaried work. The folk high schools had at this time become a vehicle for social mobility on the labour market, in contrast to the farmers’ sons and daughters, who returned to farming. On the other hand, the gender-segregated summer courses still remained. It should be noted that this shift in gender majority among students took place in a markedly patriarchal organisation, symbolically expressed by the fact that there were two principals, with the female principal being responsible for housekeeping and the social welfare of the students as well the teaching of domestic subjects (Rydbeck, 2001, p. 17). It was a world where men were in control and women were controlled, just as in society as a whole. In this sense, from a gender perspective, the folk high schools were contradictory: they gave access to education but did not provide the models for a changed gender order. When women entered the winter-courses, both sexes learned the same subjects and the folk high schools thus somewhat eroded one means of maintaining the subservient place allocated to women in society. However, the gender order was kept in place in other ways, not least by various religious and political ideologies.

That women became the majority in the winter-courses was, as far as I can see, not the outcome of a gender equality policy from the folk high schools. It rather seems to have been achieved by the women themselves through new intentions related to societal changes, for example in the labour market. They used the folk high school for their own ends and

the folk high school accepted this, not least in times of recruitment crises, as in the 1920s. This might also have somewhat displaced notions of gender identities – what was masculine and what was feminine. One institution, though not formally a folk high school, ‘the citizen’s school in Fogelsta’, had an explicitly feminist ambition to train women for politics.<sup>5</sup> It grew out of the movement for women’s suffrage and was lead by leftist liberals, an uncommon position nowadays, but recruited women from all political camps and social classes. Their courses were similar to summer courses but focussed on politics (Eskilsson and Lindberg, 2001, pp. 49–62; Knutson, 2004).

The large presence of women in folk high schools was a portent of a general change in the whole educational system where women gradually became a majority. In the case of the lower secondary schools, the shift from male to female dominance took place in 1960 (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 1963). Since then, women have become a majority in the upper secondary school and in undergraduate education. In recent years, this shift has also been taking place in the longer university education programmes and in 2003 almost the same number of male and female undergraduates began postgraduate studies (Swedish Universities and University Colleges, 2003, p. 16). It seems clear that the folk high schools were at the beginning of this social change.

This slow but steady change took place within the framework of institutions that were to a large extent dominated by a patriarchal gender hierarchy. The defence of this hierarchy has no doubt been effective and those at the top are still usually always men. In 2003, 63 per cent of the folk high schools’ board members were men and 72 per cent of the chairpersons were men and 80 per cent of the folk high school principals were men (SOU 2003:125, p. 22).

As we have seen, it was the state’s institutions, such as grammar schools and upper secondary schools that were late to change. When they did change, i.e. when girls were accepted as students, folk high schools lost their special position as the preferred choice for those with a background in the working class or the countryside. We see the pattern clearly: first, they are at the forefront, but later they lose their special position.

## **Equality in recruitment, but also a schooling to become an elite**

Thus, as early as the 1930s, the folk high schools had realised parts of the vision of social equality as a result of the changes they made to their recruitment. However, it should not be forgotten that in this case it was a question of a small group, not mass education. The people who completed folk high schools were to a high degree predestined to belong to the middle class or even an elite as a result of their studies. Many ended up as nurses or policemen or in administrative positions in trade unions, consumer or producer cooperative organisations or political parties. In this way, a form of interplay arose between folk high schools and the popular movements' need for functionaries. This also influenced the curriculum – special courses for the needs of these various movements. The links also became formalised, when such organisations established formal links with, or became the owners of, folk high schools. The first of this kind was Brunnsvik which started in 1906 and became the workers' movement's prime institution, and a large number of its officials were educated there. Of the 75 folk high schools in 1950/51, a third were owned by popular movements (Landström, 2004, pp. 37–38). Eventually practically all organisations became linked to specific folk high schools and in 2011, 107 out of 150 folk high schools were owned by popular movements, associations, organisations or foundations, while 43 were owned by county or regional councils (RIO, 2011). The folk high school also became a nursery for intellectuals with a background as labourers, who then emerged as leaders and organisers in movements and also as authors and journalists (Furuland, 2007). This was a significant change in various ways. The multiplicity of ideologies in the organisations of civil society probably partly influenced recruitment and content by adding more variation. The folk high schools seem to have been much more uniform in the early phase than in the last half century. The emergence of the movements and other organisations in the folk high schools might have been important when the folk high schools felt forced to reorientate themselves, not least concerning educational content. Sometimes, there were tensions between the old time teachers' feeling for '*bildung*' – general education – and the organisations' wishes to have a specific curriculum. Should the folk high school educate independent thinkers or effective shop stewards? (Krantz, 1998, pp. 514–520). However, as Landström has pointed out, the contemporary curricula

have a clear tendency to a very general level (Landström, 2004): when they are not teaching general education, they have formed programmes preparing for work in the cultural and welfare sector, not industry or trades.

One might also say that folk high schools were pioneers in educating adults. Until the end of the nineteenth century almost 100 per cent of the population had left school by the age of 13 or 14, or even before, and never had any encounter with education after that. When the folk high schools started there was an opening for a new theme in education: adults could take part in education. Those who entered the folk high schools were not very old, but they had entered adulthood and had also worked for some years. It is difficult to get proper figures about age in the early phase of the folk high schools, but some information is given in an article about the folk high school in *Nordisk familjebok*<sup>6</sup> where the ages of the students in 1907 were said to be ‘from 18 to 36 years old and with an average age of 21 to 22 years’ (*Nordisk familjebok*, 1908, vol. 8, p. 757). It means that even the youngest student had worked for many years after completing elementary school. Folk high schools were on the whole rather alone in educating adults in full-time studies until the middle of the twentieth century, when formal upper secondary schools for adults were started up and eventually formed the basis of the establishment of a state controlled adult education organisation, which was run by the municipalities – ‘komvux’ – in 1968. It expanded and has quickly become the dominating form of adult education in Sweden. One might say that the folk high schools lost their position here as the main educational institution for adults, but became only an alternative to the mainstream.

## **Curricular reorientation**

The situation for folk high schools with a focus on general education therefore became rather precarious in the 1960s. They started to reorientate themselves. The summer courses were abolished – preparation for the duties of housewives perhaps seemed anachronistic. The labour market expanded and women used adult education and folk high schools as a bridge from being housewives into paid work. This kept a certain interest in general education alive, but it was not enough. Many folk high schools met the challenges through adding new curricula. Specialising in cultural or aesthetic areas was one change. Folk high

schools started special programmes in art and craft (Hartman, 1993, p. 245), something which was not provided for in secondary school and recruited very few people at tertiary level.<sup>7</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s many folk high schools started special programmes in music (Larsson, 2007, p. 89). There was employment for leaders of amateur music in the popular movements or study associations' music circles. This is nowadays a prominent part of the programmes offered by the folk high schools. Another innovation was the start of a special programme of training for work with children and youngsters for their leisure time.<sup>8</sup> At the same time the folk high schools were starting to argue that some programmes should be offering education on the level of higher education – the leisure leader programme was one and another was a programme for the training of journalists (SOU 1977:8, p. 63–121). A few folk high schools specialising in music have also formally transformed to providers of higher education. However, the situation was somewhat less favourable, when the government decided to include an aesthetic programme in upper secondary schools in 1994 (Hägerhed, 2007). The folk high schools thus once again lost their 'monopoly' on a genre of education, which rapidly had become very popular among young people. Another new kind of education was related to an upswing in the labour unions' activities in the middle of the 1970s, supported by a radical wave, which among other things resulted in legislation which gave workers a better position on job security, the right to study leave and better economic conditions while studying, not only full time, but also in short courses. The folk high schools were used a lot for short courses related to the unions. However, the neoliberal and neoconservative wave undermined this enthusiasm by reducing funding and as a result these activities were substantially reduced. There was also a change in the discourse on education. Instead of equality, economic growth became a prime goal in the public debate in education, and in educational policy documents at the beginning of the new millennium (Gustavsson, 1997, pp. 26–29; Larsson, 1997, pp. 42–43).

The neoliberal wave gave way to another phenomenon – the privatisation of adult education in the form of procurement, i.e. the operation of tax funded adult education was put out to competitive tendering. This took place on a grand scale related to a very heavy investment in adult education for the unemployed – in English called 'the adult education initiative': 100,000 full-time study places every year.<sup>9</sup> Alongside the 'adult education initiative' a quasi-market was

introduced where all kinds of players were involved: small enterprises, big corporations, municipality owned companies, even study association owned companies tendered for this money and were often successful (Lumsden Wass, 2006). Folk high schools also went for this, which meant that they offered to provide education which followed the national curriculum.

### **Independent force or competitor in the education market**

To sum up, folk high schools have fulfilled the role of forerunners and have been an experimental workshop in relation to the education system as a whole. They have, in that sense, advanced a number of key developments when it comes to the questions of who should be educated, what it is important to teach and how activities can be organised. They have broken through the narrow limitations of who could acquire an education and contributed to increasing equality in participation in terms of class, gender, region and generation. They have also contributed to the establishment of a study activity that has the development of civil society as its context and paved the way for a socially relevant ‘curriculum’ and also to a greater diversity in what can be studied. The folk high schools have also contributed to new, more informal relationships between teachers and students, instead of a focus on discipline. All in all, I argue that this points to a substantial tradition of renewal.

One can discuss what lies behind this seemingly constantly reestablishing, innovative role. A common characteristic seems to be that the needs of certain groups were neglected by the education system as a whole. One could also point to the fact that the inability of the rest of the education system to respond to needs that arise is one reason why there have always been needs to be satisfied. To some extent it is the representatives of those whose needs have been neglected who start folk high schools. Another factor is that the folk high schools are in a marginal position, i.e. the formal educational system is determined by those in power, so that the government can decide through the national curriculum what it is valuable to know and what cannot be taught within the formal system (the universities being an exception). Folk high schools cannot prevent the formal system, including their initiatives, and therefore are constantly forced to find something else to focus on.

When they look for something new, it seems as if their relations to the organisations in civil society are the important factor as these are often the source of innovation.

Sweden was, during the postwar period, considered in some quarters to be a progressive welfare state (Ball and Larsson, 1989). Equality, measured by Gini coefficients, grew from the early 1930s until the early 1980s, which gave empirical evidence to this picture (Björklund and Jäntti, 2011). However, the global waves of neoliberalism and neoconservatism have also changed Sweden: inequalities have increased as in almost everywhere else in the world and are now in Sweden at the same level as in the U.S in the 1980s. Privatisation of education, health and care of the elderly has not only meant involvement by local small businesses, but has quickly resulted in a market of profit-making oligopolies, some embarrassing the government by being located in tax-havens. The Swedish school system is now actually a model for the British Conservative Party (Pierce, 2008). The state and the market have come closer by both focusing on economic usefulness in the sense that education has become an asset which generates revenue in employable labour and is informed by the needs of the labour market, with a curriculum in the interests of the corporate sector. This is probably familiar to most readers, since this is a global phenomenon, expressed in international organisations such as the EU and the OECD. Adult education in Sweden has also, since 2006, during the present conservative government, suffered from the effects of a supply-side economic policy. Adult education has been regarded as a bad thing in the sense that it reduces the supply of labour on the market and can result in an increase in the price of labour, which is contrary to the aim of making labour cheaper. Resources for adults' full-time study have therefore been looked upon with suspicion and have been cut, in spite of high unemployment rates. High levels of unemployment have, since the Great Depression, been followed by more resources for adult education. This new view of adults engaging in full-time studies creates a fundamentally difficult situation for adult education.

That folk high schools preserve autonomy is important in this context where the vision of education is narrowed. The autonomy of the folk high schools to invent new curricula has been important throughout their history and should be defended; it has meant that new needs have been met and fewer people have been excluded because of their class, sex or age. The folk high school has also in that way had a democratic

role, contributing to equality in a number of ways following the changes in society. With their relative freedom they have also been important as an engine in the development of the educational system, where new educational needs can be given space to be satisfied. How does the future look?

The autonomy of the folk high schools is being threatened from inside by their adaptation to the quasi-market of formal education, e.g. recruiting teachers who are qualified to teach secondary school subjects, rather than those who have a background in civil society organisations or teacher training as folk high school teachers, in order to be a subcontractor in the formal system. This also undermines the folk high schools' ability to defend their identity as being different from other educational institutions, an argument to justify the financial support they receive from the state, which is actually the prerequisite for their independence. Without this support they would have to rely completely on winning contracts. Another threat might be a new institution for vocational education, higher vocational education, which organises education on the basis of local initiatives resulting in a greater variety of curriculum. In this latter respect it is similar to folk high schools, but the kind of education that dominates is very different from the folk high schools. Folk high schools can also be involved in some of these programmes. One might also wonder about the role of civil society organisations, owners of most of the schools. Their needs should be able to fill folk high schools with activities. However, many of these are actually in deep trouble with falling numbers of members and also with difficulties in recruiting from younger generations.

If folk high schools should mean anything in relation to equality they have to face the challenges emanating from the new class society, with clearer boundaries between rich and poor. They should consider their relation to society during a reactionary period in history. Rapidly growing housing segregation in cities produces new regional inequalities – some folk high schools have met this by the allocation of units to poor areas. Political mobilisation is old in folk high schools, but the challenge is to reach new groups – for example, there is a feminist school in a poor suburb, there are schools and courses which give room for marginalised minorities and there are schools run by labour unions. On the other hand there are also some folk high schools specialising in elite careers in music and art by students with high cultural capital. It is a mixed picture. However, it seems wise to abstain from making a prognosis about the

future for the folk high schools because they have always been able to find unexpected solutions to problems and means to deal with threats.

## Notes

- 1 The first embryo of the avant-garde thesis was presented in 1998 (Larsson, 1998) and an elaborated version in Swedish, which also covered other forms of popular education, has been published (Larsson, 2005), but also presented in English at the celebration of the labour movement's folk high school, Brunnsvik, 100 years (Larsson, 2006).
- 2 Avant-garde is originally a military term: the part of an army advancing before the main forces. It is often used metaphorically in art etc.
- 3 Kyle and Herrström, 1972, p. 63–65. The information applies to the grammar schools in Gothenburg in 1871–1880 and 1891–1900 and the municipal girls' schools in the same city in 1861–1900.
- 4 Durkheim describes how such a curriculum operated during the years after the French revolution (1985, pp. 295–300).
- 5 Medborgarskolan i Fogelsta – translated to English: 'the citizens' school in Fogelsta' gave courses 1925–1954.
- 6 Nordisk familjebok is considered as the best Swedish encyclopedia from the early twentieth century, often supporting arguments with detailed statistics
- 7 In the art and craft area, Hartman estimates the number of special programmes to more than 30 in 1978/79.
- 8 SOU 1977:8 reports that 33 folk high schools gave such courses in 1976, p. 67.
- 9 In Swedish: 'Kunskapslyftet', which started in 1997 and was gradually downscaled after 2002.

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## Part III

# Popular education and power



## CHAPTER SIX

# **Dimensions of power: The influence of study circles**

*Eva Andersson and Ann-Marie Laginder*

## **Introduction**

How can study circles in Sweden be understood in relation to power? Participation is voluntary and there are practically no limits regarding the subject of study. The participants have their own motives for studying but at the same time the study circles are interwoven with goals on other levels. The aim of the government subsidy to popular education overall is that it should contribute to strengthening and developing democracy. The government also points out that the activities should contribute to people's possibilities to influence their life situation and encourage their engagement in societal development and cultural life. The Decree on Government Subsidies to Popular Education (1991:977, last revised in 2011) also stresses the importance of levelling educational gaps. The Swedish National Council of Adult Education has the power to regulate and distribute the subsidies. However, the study associations are free to formulate their own goals in relation to their profiles and member organisations. The implications of these regulations and goals can be interpreted from different perspectives of power.

The significance of study circles, from a democratic perspective, has been investigated by several researchers (Bjerkaker and Summers, 2006; Gougoulakis, 2001; Larsson, 2001; Oliver, 1987). The history of Swedish popular education is embedded in the history of social movements like

the labour movement, the temperance movement and the free church movement. According to Sundgren (2000), it might be said that popular education has both retained its enlightening nature for the members in general and has had a mobilising function by being a springboard for its elite. In both senses it has strengthened the collective interests. Arvidson (1985) made an historical survey of the study circle activities of the labour movement and the free churches during the period between 1910 and 1979. Some principal changes regarding the content and view of knowledge can be highlighted. From the end of the 1920s he noticed a change from fundamental subjects, useful for the goals of the movements, to a larger proportion of subjects aimed at leisure and hobby activities. He gives at least two explanations for this change. Firstly, he relates the change to the development of Swedish society in which the antagonism between the dominant social culture and social movements had decreased. The second explanation is that living standards had increased and working hours had decreased through legislation. The time for leisure activities had thereby increased. Arvidson stresses that the collective interest is still there, but the central task in study circles has become more and more about fulfilling individual needs (Arvidson, 1985; 1989; 1996).

The point of departure in this chapter is the micro level, i.e. the motives, interests and experiences of people who participate in study circles in contemporary Sweden. For two decades we have conducted extensive qualitative and quantitative research with a focus on individuals' participation in study circles in all kind of subjects. This means that our analysis is built on a large amount of empirical data. Our aim in this chapter is to interpret the significance of participating in study circles in terms of power. What kind of experiences of inclusion in, and influence on society do the participants put forward? In what ways do study circles contribute to the participants' ability to take power over their lives? Before we elaborate our understanding of the concept of power in the study circle context we begin with a brief overview of the large scale of study circle activity in Sweden, followed by a presentation of our empirical data.

## **A mass phenomenon**

Popular education in the form of study circles has become a mass phenomenon in contemporary Sweden involving a significant proportion

of the population (Larsson and Nordvall, 2010). In addition, the study associations of today arrange a lot of shorter cultural programmes and other group activities besides study circles. This is due in a large part to relatively substantial government subsidies.

Sweden's population in 2011 was 9,482,855. There were 7,563,649 adults over 18 years. Although it was quite some time ago, in 1995 approximately 75 per cent of the Swedish population between 18 and 75 years of age had participated in a study circle at least once (Jonsson and Gähler, 1995). In 2011, 280,400 study circles took place, with 1,791,000 participants (43 per cent men and 57 per cent women). Taking into account that one individual can attend more than one study circle, the number of unique individuals is 683,173. Ten study associations arranged study circles in hundreds of different subjects. The aesthetic subject area of art, music and media was the most common content and 60.8 per cent of the circles had this proportion, as counted in study hours, in 2011. Within this subject area, music, theatre and dance were predominant. The subject area of humanities, such as languages and history, comprised 14.7 per cent of the total amount of study hours, while the area of social and behavioural science reached 5.9 per cent. The range of other different subjects such as, for example, cooking, preventive healthcare, sports, consumer science, gardening and computer sciences together comprised 18.6 per cent (The Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2012). An average study circle consisted of 6–7 participants taking part for an average of 38 study hours.

Among the participants there is a considerable heterogeneity in the motives for attending a study circle and in the significance they ascribe to their participation. To develop an interest, learn about that subject and to take part in an activity in a context characterised by social solidarity are the three main reasons put forward by almost all participants. In one of our own investigations we concluded that all these three aspects taken together are what constitutes a study circle when motives for studying and the importance of studying are concerned (Andersson *et al.*, 1996).

Another way of understanding the phenomenon of study circles is to refer to the 'study circle grammar' characterised by the following dominating features: no tests or grades, voluntary participation, small groups, weekly meetings of approximately three hours with a coffee-break and an equal relationship between the leader and the participants, irrespective of the leader being one of the participants or an expert (Larsson, 1995; 2001, with reference to Tyack and Tobin, 1994, who

described the general features of the compulsory school as ‘grammar of schooling’).

## **Empirical data**

The empirical data used in this chapter originates mainly from three investigations of participants in study circles. The investigations have in one way or another focused on what kind of impacts the circle studies have had on the participants’ everyday lives and for society. The *Study Circle Society* (Andersson *et al.*, 1996) aimed to investigate participants’ motives for studying in a study circle and the significance the studies had in their everyday lives and in the local community. The main empirical material consisted of qualitative, in depth interviews with 63 participants in different subjects and case studies of three local communities of a different size and character. In the case studies we used a lot of locally written material, for instance policy documents, annual reports and advertising material. We also held interviews with politicians, executive officials and administrators in the local administration and representatives of the study associations in the local community. The *Study Circle Participants 2008* (Andersson, Larson and Lindgren, 2009) aimed to investigate four questions: (1) who participates in study circles; (2) how are the study circles designed; (3) how do the participants describe the outcome of their participation; and (4) in which ways are the work-methods and activities in the study circles related to the outcome of the circles. The investigation was carried out in the form of a survey, sent to a random sample of 10,800 participants (response rate: 45 per cent) and analysed quantitatively. In order to formulate appropriate questions and answer alternatives, forty-nine interviews with participants took place before the questionnaire was constructed. A third investigation (Laginder, 2011) focused on *learning and meaning in study circles in arts and crafts*. In total eleven participants were interviewed, two or three participants in the same study circle in weaving, woodwork, silver forging or needle binding. Comprehensive questions focused on how the interest began, why they became interested in the chosen kind of arts and crafts and why they chose to attend a study circle. The questions also focused on learning in practice within the study circle and the meaning individuals ascribed to their participation and their acquired skills. A study of the *Study Circle Leadership* had also taken place (Andersson, 2000). Statements from interviews with twenty study circle leaders and visits to their study

circles were later translated into answer options in a questionnaire. The questionnaire was firstly tested in one municipality and sent to all the 600 study circle leaders in that municipality (response rate: 65 per cent). Secondly, the questionnaire was sent to a random sample of 1,230 study circle leaders in Sweden (response rate: 71 per cent). In this chapter our aim is thus to reanalyse our findings from the above investigations, this time with a focus on power dimensions.

### **The concept of power in the study circle context**

Attempts to define the concept of power often state that the concept is controversial and highly contested. Different theories give completely different approaches to interpreting power and power relations (Engelstad, 2006; Lukes 2004/2008; Petersson, 1987). Starting from the inextricably intertwined relationship between power and knowledge, Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) discuss three dimensions of power drawing on Luke and Gaventa's previous work. The analysis in Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) is focused on power and knowledge in relation to participatory research. However, we have found their elaborated interpretations of power and knowledge helpful in understanding these intertwined concepts and also in study circles as learning contexts.

The first dimension of power through knowledge may, in Gaventa and Cornwall's interpretation, be conceived as resources to be mobilised to influence public debate. They stress that this view risks blaming the silent majority for not taking part in the public debate, instead of recognising how some groups are prevented from taking part. From the second dimensional view, empowerment through knowledge could mean challenging expertise but it also highlights the importance of possibilities to participate in the process of shaping knowledge. However, this view may allow the powerful to set the agenda. Using and producing knowledge affects people's awareness and consciousness and affects their lives. The third dimension emphasises the ways of influencing consciousness by taking control of the agenda in the first place (power through ideology). Gaventa and Cornwall claim that all three dimensions of power focus on the 'repressive side of power, and conceptualize power as a resource that individuals gain, hold and wield' (*ibid.*, p. 72).

With references to the critics of the limits of these dimensions Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) put forward that power also can be seen in more

positive ways, as in the power to act. The broadening of the concept helps us to understand power dimensions in relation to participation in study circles – especially the interpretation that power, in some cases, can be seen as ‘power within’, shaped by the individuals’ identity and self-conception of agency as well as something that is limited by others. They add a fourth dimension, the relational view of power drawing on Foucault. Their final conclusion is a broader approach to power including positive aspects through which power enables action, as well as how it delimits it.

Power in this sense may not be a zero-sum relationship, in which B acquiring power may mean the necessity of A giving up some for it. Rather, if power is the capacity to act upon boundaries that affect one’s life, to broaden those boundaries does not always mean to limit those of others. In this sense power may have a synergistic element, such that action by some enables action by others. Challenging the boundaries of the possible may in some cases mean that those with relatively less power, working collaboratively with others, have more, while in other cases it may cause direct conflict between the relatively powerful and the relatively powerless (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001, p. 72).

As we have discussed earlier, Arvidson (1989; 1996) argues that there has been a shift from popular education perceived as a way of developing collective power resources, to a view where knowledge becomes an end in itself. But his conclusion is that the collective interest is still there, even though the fulfilling of individual needs has been put to the forefront. Although we have taken our point of departure from the individual participant’s view, the power significances have collective or societal implications. Engelstad (2006) argues that a subordinate position does not have to be the same as powerlessness. When people meet and cooperate in different settings and local communities they build networks and trust which are conducive for a functioning democracy (Putnam, 1993/2011).

According to Hayward (Hayward and Lukes, 2008), agents act to a certain extent within limits set by the actions of other agents. But at the same time, all agents act in contexts that are structured by rules, laws and norms. These social boundaries limit what they can do and what they can be. As agents act and interact within structural limits, Hayward means that they ‘develop expectations about what is that one does, and what is that one ought to do, in particular contexts’ (*ibid.*, p. 14). Hayward concludes that ‘structure shapes social action *through* social

meanings, which agents continually interpret and re-interpret' (*ibid.*, p. 15). The agents in our case, the participants, become part of a structure, which is ruled by expectations and norms connected to the study circle as a learning context. Norms of how to behave in this context are both tacit and explicit, which we will come back to in our empirical analysis. Dahlström (1987) identifies different means of using power. The use of power through moral bindings seems to be of relevance in the study circle context. Moral bindings can be expected in voluntary organisations because within those organisations both common interests and oppositional interests may be found. The participants in study circles often have a common interest in the subject studied and a wish to learn more about it. At the same time, there might be different forms of oppositional interests or unequal conditions between the participants when the opportunity to use the knowledge is taken into account.

Our purpose in the following text is to interpret dimensions of power in the participants' statements about the significance of study circles, drawing on the above reasoning. We start with a wider perspective, taking the participants' life contexts into account. Then we discuss the development of power resources in study circles, i.e. acquiring general knowledge and skills, strengthening democratic abilities, becoming conscious of societal issues and getting a free zone by studying subjects close to individual interests. Thereafter, we discuss power relations within the study circles. We end up with some concluding remarks.

## **Dimensions of power in a life context**

Our interpretation of the significance of the study circles takes into account the interplay between the significance for the participants in relation to their whole life situation and the significance of the study circles for society. In our research we also found that the significance of participating in study circles can differ for one single person, i.e. it shifts over time due to his or her life situation (Andersson *et al.*, 1996).

We start with two short portraits of study circle participants, we call them *Astrid* and *Juhani*. Our point is to illustrate how study circles become intertwined in different individuals' lives. Their trajectories comprise a range of statements that we, in our analysis in this chapter, interpret in relation to power, both in an individual and in a social sense.

*Astrid* lived in a medium-sized town in Sweden. While her children were small she worked at home. At the age of 40 she began to work in

elderly care in the community. During her working life she was a trade unionist and talked about her engagement in a number of study circles in which she also had the task of being the leader. She was born and raised in a farmhouse and the willingness to participate and influence was not something she had brought from home. ‘No, it was probably thanks to the union’ she said.

When her husband became ill, Astrid chose to retire. The desire to have a voice led her to engage in the housing association that she was a member of and within the church. She said that there was at least one study circle running all the time in the housing association. They studied the rights and obligations connected with housing. The study circle she was participating in when we interviewed her was about the municipal buildings and cultural history. The interest in cultural history was awakened through the study circle, she said. It was the solidarity with other members in the association that motivated her to become involved. The importance of social solidarity increased when she became a widow. It was basically the same group that had participated for a number of years and they had chosen the subject together.

The fact that the participants were from the same housing association and that they had participated in several study circles together had also played a role in the residential area. They organised the association’s 30-year anniversary and made an exhibition of old photos showing what the area had looked like in the past. Both the trade union and the housing association were members in The Workers Educational Association (ABF) and this was important to Astrid, ‘it is where I belong’.

When Astrid summarised her engagement in the study circles she stressed the social solidarity and said with a smile that ‘something has been well stuck in my head gradually over the years’ which meant that she had become braver when it came to speaking in public and in common conversations. The end of the interview revealed that Astrid’s big hobby was her allotment. Then she said that she had been selected as the study organiser of the allotment association as well. She has initiated a study circle about tree pruning (interview in Andersson *et al.*, 1996).

Our interpretation of Astrid’s journey is that her engagement as the study organiser in the trade union as well as circle leader and participant in study circles, meant that she acquired democratic abilities. These abilities developed as ripples through her involvement in other associations. She gained power resources both as an individual and as a member of a collective with common interests. The importance of social

solidarity in the study circles increased when she retired and became a widow. But the study circle participation also went beyond her self-interest and contributed to increasing the membership and power in the associations. In turn, the associations fulfilled an important social and empowering function in the community. This could be interpreted as both ‘power within’, i.e. she made her voice heard, and as power to act (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001). Her journey also illustrates the thesis of Putnam (1993/2011) stating that the building of networks and cooperation between people imply trust that in turn promotes democracy. Then we turn to Juhani’s story.

Juhani was born in Finland and came to Sweden at the start of the 1970s. He had worked as a carpenter and was one of the founders of a local Finnish cultural association that organised a lot of activities. Juhani was mainly engaged in the music section, playing different instruments and singing in the choir.

We met Juhani in a study circle in which participants learned how to build the Finnish music instrument *kantele*. The circle was organised by the Finnish association in cooperation with a Swedish study association. All the participants were from Finland. Juhani pointed out the difference between building a house and building an instrument. ‘One learns how to handle such softwood as spruce. One has to be very careful.’ This was the second *kantele* Juhani had built and they had used the instruments when performing in cultural festivals and such like in the local community.

Juhani explained that he had been unemployed for a number of years and said that his engagement in the association and the study circles was what kept him going. ‘When unemployed it is vital that one can fill the days with meaningful activities’, he stressed. He emphasised the importance of having friends in the same situation and with the same interests and explained what this meant for society from his point of view (interview in Andersson *et al.*, 1996).

Power can be considered as a resource that an individual or a group can act on. Our interpretation of Juhani’s narrative is that the study circles, as well as the other activities in the association, helped Juhani to maintain his self-confidence and structure his day. The circles gave him a feeling of belonging in a group with similar interests and life situations and an opportunity to be useful while he was unemployed. Juhani’s life situation differs a lot from Astrid’s. However, we can identify ‘power within’ and power to act in both stories (Gaventa and Cornwall,

2001). In the circle he had kept up and developed his knowledge and skills in working with wood. In this activity he combined skills from his previous employment with his interest in music and in that sense he made his life more complete. The association and the study circles also had societal significances. The members could strengthen their identity of being ‘Finnish Swedes’. To learn how to build this special Finnish instrument was a way of keeping a Finnish tradition alive at the same time as it introduced something new into Swedish culture. In a similar way as the social movements in the beginning of the twentieth century used the study circles to strengthen the identity and the conditions of their members, the minorities in Sweden today may use the study circles for the same purpose. Contrary to formal education, study circles do not have to be neutral in relation to politics, religion or ideologies of other kinds.

In both Astrid’s and Juhani’s cases the study circles were organised within associations. In terms of power, this meant that the distance between gaining power resources and using these resources was very close. By acquiring knowledge, individuals and groups enhance their ability to assert their interests – in society in general and in everyday life. However, it is not only the struggle to acquire knowledge that can be understood in terms of power. Study circles can be seen not only as an opportunity to develop existing knowledge but also as a context in which knowledge is developed and defined on the individual’s or the group’s terms. Study circles can in this sense be interpreted as alternative public arenas where social, political or religious groups, in particular, assert their own claims on truth and their own knowledge (Andersson *et al.*, 1996). In the following analysis we aim to deepen the understanding of dimensions of power related to study circles. Our starting point is the dimensions we found in the narratives of Astrid and Juhani regarding different perspectives of power through acquiring knowledge and skills.

## **Developing power resources through study circles**

### ***Power through acquiring knowledge and skills***

Democracy is about distributing resources, first and foremost political power, but also other kinds of resources such as education. To organise study activities, whatever the study content may be, for people who otherwise would not have been able to study, can therefore be seen as a

democratic activity in itself. However, the participation in study circles is not equal. On the one hand higher social classes have greater degrees of participation; on the other hand study circle participation is more equal than other forms of adult education in Sweden (Larsson, 2001).

Self-confidence is strongly related to the feeling of being knowledgeable, well informed and competent, whatever the subjects are. Giving the opportunity to study is in itself a characteristic feature of a democratic society. A wide range of people attend study circles, regardless of age, gender and formal level of education. The circles are also used by older people who do not have many other possibilities for education. The lack of regulation on content means that it is easy to create circles with new topics (Larsson, 2001). Consequently the study circles comprise a large number of subjects beside traditional school subjects. Some statistics illustrating this were presented earlier. The subjects are most often connected to peoples' everyday lives in some sense (Andersson *et al.*, 1996; Andersson, Larson and Lindgren, 2009). An illustration is given by a male participant in a study circle in sewing and a female participant in woodwork.

*I have joined the study circle and patched pants and sewn in zippers. I had a sewing machine standing at home, and I thought that instead of running and curl ladies I do it myself (Andersson *et al.*, 1996).*

*It was so at home with us that things were not done. I nagged, but it was still not done, so I thought that now I'll learn to use drills, band saws, etc. I belong to the generation that barely learned to deal with hammer and nails on the basis of sex and tradition (Laginder, 2011).*

As mentioned above, the survey *Study Circle Participants 2008* was sent to participants in all kinds of subjects. The answers were given on a four-point scale: totally agree, agree to a large extent, agree to a minor extent or do not agree at all. Almost half of the participants totally agreed or agreed to a large extent with the statement that they wanted to improve their general knowledge and two thirds agreed that they had the motive to acquire special knowledge within an area of interest. Apart from what is sometimes found in formal education, the motives given by study circle participants are almost always very concrete, i.e. the participants explain the situations in which they plan to use the knowledge (Andersson *et al.*,

1996). The following quotation illustrates such a concrete motive related to acquiring knowledge and skills:

*Well, because I wanted to be better in managing the computer, partly when one writes messages and if one writes e-mails and if one wants to use some of the delicacies there are . . . (Andersson, Larson and Lindgren, 2009).*

The participants also seemed to have got what they came for. 94 per cent answered that they totally agreed or agreed to a large extent with the statement that they had improved their knowledge and/or skills and 84 per cent stated that the subject content had been interesting.

In the survey we also asked the participants to estimate whether they had actually used the knowledge from the circle in different situations. We used a three-point scale: much, to a certain extent, not at all. Approximately one third answered that they had used the knowledge much in their leisure time. One out of five said that they had made much use of the knowledge in an association or other organisation. About 8 per cent answered that they had made much use of the knowledge in their neighbourhood and 10 per cent that they had used the knowledge much in society as a whole. Approximately 8 per cent answered that they had used the knowledge and skills from the circle as an employee and 3 per cent that they had used the circle knowledge in a company of their own (Andersson, Larson and Lindgren, 2009)

As we saw earlier in the case of Juhani, the knowledge and skills from the circle can sometimes be used in relation to the participant's work and his or her leisure activities at the same time. We also have examples of participants who have studied languages, computer software etc., solely with the motive that knowledge in these subjects was needed at work. Small private companies sometimes encourage their employees to use the study circles since they take place in the evenings in the employees' leisure time. Small companies can seldom afford to let their employees be away for a couple of days on daytime courses. In return the company may compensate the employees for their expenses (the circle fee and study materials). Farmers are another group that sometimes uses study circles to learn about new national and international regulations, subsidies that could be applied for and of course subjects related to animal husbandry, and forestry, environment and nature. During the Swedish entrance into the European Union, special study materials for

farmers were prepared. As we showed above, the scope of this way of using the circles is not great.

In *Study Circle Participants 2008*, one question concerned whether the study circles inspired the participants to continue to study. About two-thirds agreed totally or to a large extent with the statement that they had been inspired to continue studying the circle subject. Half of the participants agreed to being inspired to take more study circles, almost one out of five had been inspired to embark on a longer education and 15 per cent said that they had been inspired to try to have the subject as their occupation. Study circles can accordingly be a way into more formal education and also a way to try out possible future occupations. This was something we had already noticed in the *Study Circle Society* regarding young people.

### ***Democratic abilities as power resources***

One conclusion in the *Study Circle Society* was that they first and foremost contribute to democracy indirectly, which means that the participants develop abilities and skills that are necessary for active participation in society. Power in this sense does not mean a zero-sum relationship, where some lose power while others gain it; rather it can be interpreted as a capacity to act upon boundaries that affect one's life (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001). The interviews gave us the following examples of abilities related to democracy: being better able to express one's opinion, collaborating and listening to other peoples' views and making informed decisions. A stronger feeling of self-confidence was also something mentioned by many participants and we interpreted those statements as important values in a democratic society as well. We also found the circles to be significant arenas for exchanging everyday experiences and for forming opinions. These democratic abilities can be seen as power resources related to the individuals that can be used for individual as well as for social purposes. However, the use of these abilities is mainly supposed to take place in contexts outwith the circles, for example by engaging in associations of different kinds, but also for structuring the inner lives of the circles (Andersson *et al.*, 1996).

In the later survey of *Study Circle Participants 2008* we asked the participants whether these abilities had been strengthened through the study circle participation. Approximately one third of the participants agreed totally or to a large extent with the statements that they had become better at expressing their views, listening to other people's views

and collaborating with others. Slightly fewer agreed with the statement that the circles had made them better at making informed decisions. More than four out of ten answered that the circle had strengthened their feelings of self-confidence. This is the voice of a participant in a circle in literature:

*... just such a small thing as when one gives a short talk about a book ... and the others are sitting quiet and listening to what I have to say ... one structures a short talk, even if it is very short, one has to ... one cannot just say that 'it was good'. It is not enough. They wouldn't accept it. . . . (Andersson, Larson and Lindgren, 2009).*

Approximately one third of the participants agreed that they had developed their critical thinking and gained new values by studying in the circle, and more than 20 per cent also agreed with the statement that the circle had inspired them to try to change things in society.

The study circles have historically had strong relations to popular movements and have aimed to develop abilities that could be used later on in the movements' activities in order to change conditions in society (Arvidson, 1985). The figures from the *Study Circle Participants 2008* show that many participants in contemporary Sweden are active members of associations of different kinds. More than 70 per cent of the participants claimed that they were members of an association; half of these indicated that they participated actively in meetings and activities within that association and more than one third stated that they had a position of trust. However, this does not mean that all of these participants studied in a circle within an association. About one third of the participants said that they got the information about the circle from an association, a quarter that the circle was part of the work within an association and 20 per cent that participation in the circles was required in order to have a position of authority in an association. In this way the structure and expectations of loyalty to the collective interests shaped in the associations influenced the norms of the individuals' voluntary participation in the study circle (Hayward and Lukes, 2008). A participant in a trade union circle illustrates this aspect:

*I hadn't taken such a circle before, but I have a commission of trust and then one is supposed to take one . . . (Andersson, Larson and Lindgren, 2009).*

The circles also seemed to inspire some participants to become members of an association, network, action group or the like. Slightly less than 20 per cent claimed that they had been inspired to do so (Andersson, Larson and Lindgren, 2009). So far we have interpreted the participants' statements on the significance of their participation in terms of individual and collective power acquired through democratic abilities, irrespective of the subject focused on. In the following sections we aim to analyse dimensions of power in relation to study circles in societal issues. Then we analyse study circles and their close linkages to personal interests.

### ***Study circles in societal issues***

Some subject content can be said to have a closer relation to power than others, i.e. the content concerns societal issues, sometimes also close to engagement in associations and social movements. Examples of such subjects are environmental issues, peace, human rights, how to achieve a sustainable society, drug-related questions, etc. These subjects are often of a 'read and discuss' nature. For example, one male participant who studied in a circle about the conflict between Israel and Palestine said that:

*At each encounter we discuss what should be next week's focus, for instance the question of water supply. It could be the political situation or it could be the historical etcetera. . . . Our two circle leaders then prepared the encounter and if any of the participants had their own questions we could take them up as well. We read lots of literature, got tips on literature . . . both factual study books and fiction (Andersson, Larson and Lindgren, 2009).*

Some circles are very closely related to the political parties or other groups that actually take action in society. For example, a political party at a local level used the study circle to train members of municipal councils in how to influence decisions. A female participant in a circle entitled 'Our municipality can do better' explained:

*Most recently in the study circle, we had meeting technology. It may sound trite, but there are both old and new members and it's a certain technique that you may need to master or at least be aware of (Andersson et al., 1996).*

We also saw in Astrid's study circle journey how integration in different associations led to action outside the study circles. Our interpretation is that the significance is increased consciousness and knowledge among the members in the associations, rather than radical changes. We might also say that her engagement enabled increased power and consciousness by working collaboratively with others (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001). Study circles can be expected to develop several indirect strategies in relation to power. Channels for mobilisation are developed when people meet and exchange views and experiences. The participants also become trained in decision-making and conflict regulation. But in some cases the consequence is that controversial policy decisions are facilitated rather than being questioned. Astrid told, for example, that in the 1970s there were major changes within elderly care. Study circles were arranged in cooperation between the trade union and the employer. 'Afterwards, you understand that it was for us to be more involved and take initiative.' In retrospect, she also saw that the consequences were savings. In contrast to the above interpretation of increased power and consciousness in the group, this can be interpreted as an example of power exercised by an agenda determined outside the study circle (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001).

Study circles have sometimes been used in campaigns and referendums. In those cases, specific study material has been developed and used in many circles all over the country. Some of these circles might be seen as a means of using normative power (Dahlström, 1987). Especially before popular votes, such as for or against driving on the right side of the road, nuclear power, EU membership, etc., the circles have been used to create legitimacy and a feeling of influence. Campaign circles are often thought of as informative, that is, a way for the participants to inform themselves about different alternatives. One example of this, told by one of our interviewed participants, was when individual salaries were introduced in the public sector. The example is from the care sector in which the trade union members discussed the already agreed criteria for individual wages:

*It is about a new wage system for all wage workers in the municipalities. It is about how it is thought and structured. It is a new way of thinking for us. We brought the agreement home first and read it through so that we knew a bit about what was in it . . . then we reasoned about the content . . . (Andersson et al., 1996).*

According to the participant in the example, most of the employees participated even though most of them were against individual salaries. One may say that they were almost forced to take part in these study circles since the circles took place during working hours and at different times on week days so that it was hard to say that one could not attend. The power in the campaign circles emphasises ways of influencing consciousness with ideological implications, similar to the third dimension of power, as indicated by Gaventa and Cornwall (2001).

### ***Study circles in subjects close to individual interests***

In several research projects, study circles have been defined as a possible space beyond the demands and logics that characterise both employment, more formal educational settings, family responsibilities and housework. People devote themselves to different activities that they are interested in. Some participants talk about the study circle in terms of a free zone. Others stress the free time, i.e. an opportunity for personal growth (Andersson *et al.*, 1996; Andersson and Waldén, 1996; Laginder, 2011; Waldén, 1994). Individuals thus achieve power over their use of time and over their lives. Two female participants, one in a circle in weaving and the other one in a circle in silver forging, stated:

*This is my own evening. The study circle in weaving is only for me. And we who work think it's nice to do something outside home. Then you can drop everything like washing-up and what to have for dinner, until tomorrow. This is just to be* (Laginder, 2011).

*I work with people with problems that can weigh me down a lot. But when I participate in the study circle, it's my time* (Laginder, 2011).

The study circle can also contribute to an individual's ability to master a difficult situation. A female participant in a weaving circle explained:

*I first became unemployed and then I became retired due to illness. In order to numb it I spent a lot of time weaving. So it was a small rescue, one can say* (Laginder 2011).

In Juhani's story we saw how he assigned the study circle great importance in coping with unemployment. In his story we also find an example of interest-driven learning over a long time, to become

really skilled in building the Finnish instrument, kantele. This means that the study circle in his case became a context for learning in a life course rather than a short-term interest. Juhani's interest was integrated in cultural traditions. To learn and build the kantele became a way of keeping a Finnish tradition alive and at the same time introduced something new into Swedish culture. This exemplifies how study circles in aesthetic subjects, such as art, music and the media can contribute to new forms of cultural expressions and make them available to citizens outside the study circle (Andersson *et al.*, 1996). This can be interpreted as both individual and collective power to keep and develop cultural characteristics and manifestations.

Interest-driven learning is thus interwoven with cultural and social changes. In a broader perspective, skills in handicraft have become something people choose to learn rather than something required for every day existence. The voluntary choice to devote oneself to learn, for example, arts and crafts, can be interpreted by the concept of *learning by interest* (Laginder and Stenøien, 2011). A genuine interest lies in the direction of the individual's own growth and stands out as an imperious necessity for the individual to be him or herself. Laginder and Stenøien argue that expressions of commitment are embedded, sustainable learning provides experiences, which are in contrast to today's rapid changes. Study circles, in close relation to individual interest, have, in other words, the potential to promote the integration of knowledge, skills, meaning and joy. In turn this counteracts the tendencies in contemporary society to emphasise rapid learning and the view of citizens as consumers (Bauman, 2007). In summary, we have shown that the relationship between motivation which is driven by internal drivers, as opposed to motivation that is instrumental and external, is a critical factor in the participants' experiences of study circles.

So far we have interpreted the participants' statements on the significance of their participation in terms of developing individual and collective power resources. But what kind of power relations do we find if we turn to the participants' experiences within the study circles?

## **Power relations within study circles**

Study circles are meant to be small democracies. In the ideal study circle, the participants have influence over the study content and working methods and all participants have an equal opportunity to take part in

decisions of different kinds (The Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2007). Our results show, however, that study circles do not always have these characteristics.

According to the participants in the *Study Circle Participants, 2008*, the circle leaders had decided themselves about the study content and the working methods used in almost one third of the study circles. The results in the *Study Circle Leadership* (Andersson, 2000) showed however that the circle leaders sometimes argued that the participants wanted him or her to take these decisions. This may be maintained due to the implicit presupposition that the leader/teacher in educational settings is the one who decides what to study and how. Hartman (1999), who used observations of study circles as a means of investigating the inner democracy of the circles, also points out that decision-making was largely characterised by the weak activity of the participants. The leaders' power to take decisions was taken for granted by the participants. This form of power blames the victim and is similar to the first dimension of power in Gaventa and Cornwall's reasoning (2001).

Power relations might also be found between the participants, even if the participants seldom brought it up in the interviews. The study circle ideal states that the relations within the circle should be as equal as possible. In order to keep a feeling of equality, the circle leaders sometimes prevent the participants from speaking about their work or discussing politics or individual economy. In these cases, the intention is to keep the circle nice and cosy so that nobody will feel uncomfortable (Andersson, 2000). This intention may prevent certain questions from coming up on the agenda. One way of doing this is to keep the focus on the study content, not to move too much into other areas of discussion. In other words, there is a paradox inherent in the circles. On the one hand, the participants are expected to be active and influence the content and the working methods in the circles. On the other hand, the climate in the circles is expected to be nice and cosy, which sometimes prevents the participants from trying to influence the circle too much. This mix of implicit and explicit norms and contradictory expectations shapes the structure of the study circle as a learning context. Social action is shaped through social meanings, which the participants continually interpret and reinterpret (Hayward in Hayward and Lukes, 2008).

The importance of study circles as arenas for the exchange of experiences and forming opinions was pointed out in our research (Andersson *et al.*, 1996). When observations are used as a research

method it becomes possible to study ongoing conversations in the study circles. Among the results, Nordzell (2011) found, in her study of conversations in study circles, that the participants interact intensively with each other, showing affinity with the other members and with the group. She calls this activity ‘coproduction of narrative’. A contradictory picture is given in Lundberg (2008), who has also studied conversations in a study circle. One of his results shows that the participants do not normally give up their individual opinion, due to various positions during the conversation. This diminishes the opportunities to reach a common view.

There are some silent rules exercised in the study circles. Examples of such rules are to have respect for each other, stick to the point, not take too much speaking time, not talk too much about people who are not present, not get too intimate or private in the conversations, etc. The concept ‘study circle tactfulness’ has been used to label these implicit expectations (Andersson *et al.*, 1996). In this sense, the study circles illustrate the thesis put forward by Hayward (Hayward and Lukes, 2008) concerning structural limits.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter has been to highlight the significance of popular education for the participants’ ability to take power over their lives and their experiences of inclusion and influence in society. Arvidson (1989; 1996) argues that the collective interest to strengthen the power and influence of different associations is still there, but the central task in study circles has, more and more, become the fulfilling of individual needs. Ultimately, the participants determine the value of the study circles. They take the decision to participate and we have shown the interplay between their individual motives and collective engagement in different associations.

To summarise, we have taken a close look at study circles through the participants’ eyes, which makes it apparent that the individual and the collective interests cannot be seen as separate or contradictory in a simple dualistic way. Thus, our main conclusion is that the individual and collective interests are intertwined in a complex pattern, where the emphasis on collective purposes and individual motives varies. We have shown how this pattern is dependent on whether the study circle is integrated into an association or not but also how it is influenced by

individuals' life circumstances. The complex pattern of different interests is also an effect of the huge diversity of possible subjects.

We argue that individuals and groups enhance their ability to assert their interests – in society in general and in everyday life – by their participation in study circles. The lack of regulation of content means that it is possible to create circles around any topic. Study circles can be seen as an opportunity to further existing knowledge but also as a context where knowledge is developed and defined on the individual's or the group's own terms. The study circles in aesthetic subjects can be interpreted both as a contribution to cultural preservation and the emergence of new forms of cultural expressions in society.

According to Biesta *et al.* (2011) the discourse of lifelong learning during the last 25 years appears to have shifted from 'learning to be', supporting personal development and social progress, to a view of learning which stresses learning to be productive and employable as a means for economic growth and global competitiveness (*ibid.*, p. 5). Our conclusion is that the study circle still is a place where people can learn to be and a place for collaborative learning. In summary, popular education in the form of the study circles, independent of the subject in focus, has the potential to encourage personal growth and societal change – but it is, as shown in this chapter, a painting with many colours and nuances.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

# The global justice movement encounters Swedish popular education

*Henrik Nordvall*

This article is about the interaction between the global justice movement (MGJ)<sup>1</sup> and the Swedish popular education sector. More precisely, the focus is on the emergence of social forums in Sweden and their relation to parts of this state subsidised sector, particularly the Workers' Educational Association (ABF). Social researchers interested in social movements and a global perspective have begun to focus attention on the global justice movement's social forums (della Porta, 2009; Glasius and Timms, 2006; Nordvall, 2009; Smith, 2008). In the wake of the World Social Forum, which was first held in 2001 in Porto Alegre (Brazil), regional, national and local social forums have been organised worldwide. A central aim of the World Social Forum (WSF) is, according to its organisers, to bring together organisations, people and ideas that are critical to what is seen as a neoliberal globalisation. The name of the event highlights its ambition to be the grassroots' and the popular movements' response to the economic and political elite's annual World Economic Forum in Davos (Switzerland). The form of the social forums is usually seminars, cultural events, workshops and various meetings on the days during which the event takes place (della Porta, 2005). Rather than being an actor in itself, a social forum could be seen as 'a pedagogical and political space that enables learning, networking and political organisation' (Ponniah and Fisher 2003, p. 6). In the international debate among scholars and movement intellectuals, the social forums have, in corresponding terms,

been described as a source of alternative knowledge production and an arena for coalition-building versus the global neoliberal order (Sen *et al.*, 2004). In Sweden, the social forums were soon described as a form of popular education (*folkbildning*) among activists and intellectuals who reported from the first World Social Forums in Porto Alegre. And, when the first local social forums were established in the country, it was in collaboration with folk high schools and study associations – mainly the Workers' Educational Association.

Hence, this chapter examines the encounter between these globally widespread social forums and state-subsidised popular education in Sweden. The focus is the relationship between, on the one hand, these events, which are linked to a new global movement and, on the other hand, ABF, which originated from the labour movement. Hence ABF, which is Sweden's oldest (founded in 1902) and largest study association, is used in this chapter as the primary example of institutionalised popular education. There is a historical relationship between social movements and the emergence of popular education in Sweden. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, strong popular movements promoted their ideas through various forms of popular education, e.g. folk high schools and study associations. Over time, these schools and associations developed into a highly institutionalised popular education system with public subsidies. Popular education became a mainstream activity in Swedish society. Today, the folk high schools and the study associations can be seen as a part of the Swedish corporate state,<sup>2</sup> lying at the crossroads between civil society and the state (Rubenson, 2006).

State integration and institutionalisation of movement related popular education has been a theme in previous popular education research in Sweden. Lars Arvidson (1989) argues that popular education institutions, such as study associations, which were initiated by older social movements, in the latter half of the 1900s, changed from being a tool for movements fighting for social change, to become a tool of the welfare state. During the 1990s he noted a further development of study associations towards becoming a flexible training resource on the education market (Arvidson, 1996). Odd Nordhaug (2004) has, in similar terms, described how social engagement in popular education, which began at the grassroots level, has been institutionalised. As the study associations and folk high schools, since 1991, also self-manage the distribution of government grants through the confederative Council of Adult Education, popular education is, according to Lena Lindgren (1999), significantly closer to

a fusion with the state. With such a conversion also follows, according to Arvidson, a change from popular education that articulates social conflicts, to a form of popular education that rather tries to overcome and neutralise conflicts. As a possible contrast to this trend of older social movements, and as an interesting area of research, Arvidson (1989) points toward new social movements as a context for social change in adult education. This kind of idea regarding old and new social movements is, of course, related to the international academic debate on the subject which has been going on for the last decades, which includes claims that there are fundamental differences between them (Finger, 1989) to those who even doubt the relevance of making such distinctions. Holst (2011) for instance, summarises some of the limitations of the distinction by pointing out that there is a disputable chronology involved, due to the fact that some 'new' movements, such as the women's movement, are actually older than assumed 'old' movements. Also, people tend to be members of several movements, i.e. one individual could both be an activist for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender rights and a trade unionist. Another problematic aspect of the dichotomy is, according to Holst, that it fails to conceptualise the new type of global mobilisation initiated by people outside formal working life who are struggling to have their immediate needs met.

On a general level, this article focuses on an empirical question, which could be formulated in the following way: what happens when the global justice movement, as a new movement (or at least a new constellation of movements), in the mid 2000s, encounters the old structure created by institutionalised popular education? That question is addressed in this chapter on the basis of the cross-analysis of two previous studies I have made, including both ethnographic data and survey data (Nordvall, 2008; Wennerhag *et al.*, 2006). The interaction between the global justice movement and popular education systems is discussed through two theoretical interpretations. The first interpretation emphasises how the interaction produces an alliance that might strengthen the social forums' potential of challenging the dominant social order, i.e. its counter-hegemonic capacity. In the second interpretation, the interaction is discussed as a form of cooption into a dominant order, which might neutralise the counter-hegemonic potential. These interpretations are discussed and problematised in relation to the empirical material.

I focus on the following aspects of the interaction: (1) the administrative and material aspects of the interaction; (2) the social forum

organisers' strategic attitude towards ABF; (3) the forum participants' participation and trust in the popular education system; and (4) ABF's ideological relationship to the global justice movement. Based on my field studies I learned that these aspects were of particular importance during the emergence of the Swedish local social forums.

## **Counter-hegemonic mobilisation and cooption**

The global justice movement, as well as the social forums, is positioning itself against a global political trend of increased confidence in the private market's ability to regulate social functions. The movement resists the kind of globalisation that they believe has led to a world order in which the interests of global capital are given greater priority at the expense of social, democratic and environmental considerations (Sen *et al.*, 2004). This global, ideological and political power shift has been described by several researchers as 'neoliberal globalization' (Ryner 2002; Salt, 2000). Kristina Boréus (1994) has described the development as an international political move to the right, which in Sweden has been accompanied and accentuated by the branch organisation of Swedish employers, which since the late 1960s has launched a successful strategic campaign to change the political climate.

Scholars inspired by Antonio Gramsci have used the term hegemony to describe this neoliberal globalisation (Carroll, 2007; Mayo, 1999; Ryner, 2002). Neoliberalism has, from this perspective, become a dominant way of thinking, a hegemonic consent, which not only includes the traditional political right (conservatives and liberals), but also the labour movement and the political left. Both right wing and social democratic governments have, during the 1980s and 1990s, adopted a policy consistent with neoliberal ideas regarding market mechanisms in the public sector, privatisation and a more 'flexible' labour market (Fairclough, 2000; Ryner, 2002). From such a perspective on power, ideology and globalisation, one can see the global justice movement and the social forums as a challenge to this hegemonic consensus (Carroll, 2007). In this counter-hegemonic struggle the social forums are used as a means of politicising, where popular education, in terms of the spread and development of critical knowledge, is an important part.

Movements aspiring to challenge the established order must, from a neo-Gramscian perspective, engage in a war of position. In this war of position, one important aspect is to challenge the power of thought, the

dominant common sense, through spreading and establishing an alternative concept of reality as a new hegemonic common sense. In other words, creating a counter-hegemonic mobilisation (Carroll and Ratner, 1994; Mayo, 1999) that challenges the prevailing hegemony. For such a counter-hegemonic project to be successful, it is crucial that movements seeking social change create the necessary alliances. The counter-hegemonic forces must form a new historical block to challenge the hegemonic order and create a new (counter) hegemony.<sup>3</sup> However, from this perspective, the creation of coalitions in itself is not necessarily an expression of a successful counter-hegemonic mobilisation. If challenging groups becomes integrated into the constellation of dominant social groups such a ‘coalition’ would rather be an expression of the hegemonic order’s ability to incorporate and neutralise opposition. In such contexts the term cooption could be used (Meeuwisse and Sunesson, 1998; Sunesson, 1989). Cooption occurs when groups in power invite and give some influence and resources to oppositional groups, which create dependencies that reduce their oppositional potential. A movement’s, or movement organisation’s, success in their quest to challenge a hegemonic power structure depends, according to Carroll and Ratner (2001, p. 609), on ‘. . . avoiding both integration into established institutional orders and marginalisation to the periphery of political consciousness’. That is, it is essential for potentially counter-hegemonic mobilisation not to be neutralised by inclusion into a basically unchanged existing social order, it is also essential not to become a marginalised phenomenon with relevance only to a narrow circle of particularly politically aware persons.

Thus, one can trace a dilemma of balancing alliances for movements with counter-hegemonic aspirations, according to the perspective outlined above. On the one hand, a certain level of breadth in the coalition is necessary; on the other hand, a close relationship to powerful groups might lead to a situation in which the oppressed groups become subject to cooption. Leaders and representatives of the challenging and subordinate groups might, in a process of cooption, be absorbed into the existing order, which cements and expands the hegemonic power structure. But at the same time it is often noted in this line of theory that counter-hegemonic mobilisation and hegemonic reproduction are rarely unambiguous processes (Hall, 1988). It is also essential, from this perspective, that there is not a clear division between state and civil society (a point made by Gramsci (1988) in his *Prison Notebooks*).

The capitalist state, according to Gramsci, should not be understood in a narrow sense, as something restricted to the government and the repressive institutions (police, military), which may use force to secure social order. The state also includes a sphere in which the prevailing order is defended through the production of consensus, which is carried out in more civil settings, including various forms of education. But as already pointed out, this consensus is not established in a simple and mechanical way, it can always be contested by counter-hegemonic forces in an ongoing war of position.

## **Method and data**

In this article I combine qualitative data from participant observation, documents and web pages collected during my doctoral study (Nordvall, 2008) with quantitative data from a survey study I undertook with colleagues on participants at local social forums in Sweden (Wennerhag *et al.*, 2006). The relationship between the global justice movement's social forums, and the institutionalised popular education system, is examined with a focus on the organisational processes involved. When I illustrate the approach to ABF held by organisers from activist organisations within the global justice movement, I use qualitative data from the organisational process behind the emergence of social forums in Sweden. This particularly applies to the Stockholm social forum, whose emergence I have followed through intensive ethnographic field studies from January 2003 to August 2004. The empirical data from field studies has also been used as a basis for my interpretations of the social forum's economic and organisational links to institutionalised popular education. To examine the interaction, with a focus on ABF's approach to the global justice movement, I analysed the ideological platform of ABF which was revised in the mid 2000s (ABF, 2006a), the annual report (ABF, 2006b) and texts published on ABF's website during the same year. Both the ethnographic data and the data from ABF document and web pages were collected during my doctoral study (Nordvall, 2008).

To illustrate the approach to institutionalised popular education that can be discerned among the participants in social forums I used results from a survey study of three local social forums in Sweden ( $N = 1066$ ), in Lund, Stockholm and Gothenburg. The main results, including methodological considerations regarding the survey, are published in the book *Activists* (Wennerhag *et al.*, 2006).

## **From Porto Alegre to Stockholm**

WSF, since it was first held in 2001, has grown both in terms of the amount of participants and in terms of breadth – as a global process. The first year, 4,702 registered participants from 113 countries and 500 organisations attended. When the forum was organised for the fourth time, in January 2005, it attracted 155,000 registered participants from 135 countries and 6,872 organisations to Porto Alegre (Glasius and Timms, 2006, p. 202). To enhance the character of a global process the WSF moved for several years to other countries. In 2004 Mumbai in India hosted the event and in 2007 it was conducted in Kenya's capital, Nairobi. In 2011 the WSF was organised in Dakar, Senegal. The most tangible expression of the fact that the event has become a global process is the hundreds of local, national, continental and thematic social forums that have been established and spread in almost all continents. In Sweden, local social forums have been around since 2002 when the first ones were held in Norrköping and Lund. Social forums have since emerged in Uppsala, Umeå, Stockholm, Gothenburg, Linköping and Stockholm (all of them large or medium-sized university cities).

When the social forum phenomenon was established in Sweden there was direct contact with state subsidised popular education. The Workers' Educational Association soon became a partner. This was already the case at the first Swedish social forums, organised in 2002 in Norrköping and Lund, where programmes announced that ABF was one of the coorganisers. Much of the activity of the forums, according to ABF employees I interviewed, could be administered and registered as cultural programmes which are a category of activities that can be reported on by the organisation when claiming government support. The activities at the Swedish forums are usually, as with international counterparts (cf. Glasius and Timms, 2006, pp. 212–224), workshops and seminars in which issues about globalisation, privatisation and marketisation of social welfare, radical strategies and visions, feminism, media issues and international solidarity are raised. Through my own observations (in Stockholm) and in interviews with the organisers (in Uppsala), I have also noticed that some of the planning undertaken when organising the forum is carried out as formally registered study circles administered by the ABF.

Even some folk high schools have been included in the social forum process, through offering themselves as venues for hosting the forums

and as organisers of activities at the forums. During planning for the Stockholm social forum, I noticed the organisation of a day long course, directed by Färnebo folk high school, whose purpose was to train organisers in working with participatory meetings. At least two teachers employed by folk high schools participated in the planning of the Stockholm social forum, something that they, at least in part, could do as their jobs. In this way, state subsidised human resources contributed to the implementation of the social forum.

The most striking manifestation of the organisational link between Stockholm social forum and institutionalised popular education however, was the spatial location of the event. The Stockholm social forum held, during four days in May 2004, a programme with over 200 events spread over two primary locations in central Stockholm: the ABF building at Sveavägen and Skeppsholmen folk high school. These venues were available without charge to the Stockholm social forum (as an umbrella organisation), which formally arranged the event. The access to the ABF venue should be considered in relation to the fact that ABF Stockholm was also a member of this umbrella organisation together with, among others, ATTAC,<sup>4</sup> the local Friends of the Earth organisation, a feminist think tank called Lacrimosa, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO)'s district of Stockholm,<sup>5</sup> the activist group Globalization From Below, a network for international solidarity organisations, and a network for progressive folk high schools (Offensiv folkbildning).

Not only was the event held in the facilities of institutionalised popular education. Most of the overall work on planning the event was also located in the ABF Stockholm's premises, which became a permanent meeting point to which individuals and organisations who were interested in the planning process were invited. These invitations were partly sent out through (ABF funded) mailings to the associations and via the Stockholm social forum's website, where the following information was published.

*. . . Every other Thursday, even weeks at 17–18.00 at the ABF house, open planning meetings are held with all the planning groups which are open to anyone interested. . . . The board meets at ABF-house on Thursdays at odd weeks at 17.00 (Stockholm Social Forum, 2004).*

In addition to the support with accommodation, a study secretary, employed by ABF, was involved on a regular basis in the planning process. The main work was, however, handled on a voluntary basis by others. ABF was also responsible for a number of events at the social forum, including financing of invited speakers.

The organisers' response to ABF's support was obviously appreciated. When the study secretary offered the opportunity to use their facilities, as well as other support, it was met with great enthusiasm. This was particularly evident in the initial stage when the funding for the event was unclear, and ABF among other things, undertook to financially guarantee the possibility of inviting some foreign speakers. The financial support, addressed to the social forum as a whole, then formed the starting point for an extensive process of inviting keynote speakers. An email to the e-group that functioned as the arena for communication between physical meetings, written by an activist from ATTAC with coordinating responsibilities, illustrates how the support offered by ABF ('the ABF-bag') was considered:

*Have gone through the invitation list and counted little on air fares . . . If you consider SEK 3,000 on average for housing/living, I get it to all the costs for those who have accepted invitation in the current situation [name of five invited guests from countries including India, South Africa and Canada] are within the 60,000 crowns [estimated figure by the email's author] from the ABF-bag. In addition, it is possible to find partial funding from other sources . . .*

The invitations of international guests in turn had a significant effect on the social forum's content and marketing, as these guests were highlighted in the programme and on posters. Hence, the interaction between ABF and the economically weaker globalisation activist groups among the organisers, such as Globalization From Below and ATTAC, founded the basic outlines of the social forum.

ABF was very clearly an integral part of the social forum's emergence in Stockholm. The local social forum in turn, therefore, became indirectly integrated to a large extent into the Swedish states subsidised popular education.

## **An economic and coalition strategic approach**

It is obvious that the need for resources – space and money – was a driving force behind the organisers' interaction with ABF. Did this mean that ABF was perceived as a 'cash cow' among less affluent organisations, one which provided resources that activists then managed entirely by themselves? My field studies suggest that it would be a too reductionist explanation to describe the relationship in that way. Apart from the economic dimension of the interaction, there was an ideological and strategic dimension explicit in the interaction. The inclusion of ABF as a coorganiser was not the result of a grant related technicality. Rather, this was consistent with the social forum's stated ideological stance. In the charter of principles that forms the basis for the world social forum, which, with minor revisions became adopted as a platform also by the local forum, it states that the forum is made up of 'groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism'. For this reason the organisers rejected the possibility of seeking cooperation with Stockholm City (the municipality of Stockholm) because it was considered important to highlight that this event was organised by and through civil society, to which ABF was assumed to belong. Moreover, it was striking that ABF's connection to the trade union movement, and their activities (such as their study circles and political lectures) were regarded to be in line with the forum's ideological stance against neoliberalism.

In the early process of organising the forum, ABF became used as a link to groups which were seen, by the initial participants in the planning of the event, as specifically politically interesting to involve. The most striking example was the trade unions, whose members were considered to be important to reach. The importance of involving the Swedish trade union confederation (LO) was highlighted at several of the initial meetings, before this organisation eventually joined the social forum process. During these observed planning meetings, and in interviews, several activists with experience from the environmental movement and from work for international solidarity and global justice, stated that it 'tends to be difficult to involve LO' in joint activities.

At several meetings I observed, the study secretary from ABF took the role of an intermediary to LO, and to some extent, the role of advisor on issues, about which people in the organisation could be contacted and on how the initially hesitant reaction from LO to the invitation

would be interpreted. After this intermediation, it seemed reasonable to include the LO district organisation of Stockholm in the social forum process and this took place five months after the first initial planning meeting. LO became an active coorganiser with representatives on the umbrella organisation's board and with people participating in the work of the programme.

This proximity to the labour movement, in which ABF can be seen as having a networking link to the trade union movement, was recognised as being of significant strategic and ideological value by the other organisers. These organisers' relationship with ABF was characterised by what could be called a coalition strategic approach. The relationship cannot be reduced merely to a matter of monetary exchange. The following excerpt from my field notes from one of the early planning meetings, when LO had not yet joined the team, illustrates this approach (the names are fictitious). Agneta represents a radical cultural organisation (Ordfront) and Lars represents ATTAC.

*Agneta: Yes, if they [LO] join they probably won't be with so many activists. But they can of course help with us other things – such as the economy.*

*Lars: But if the main thing in involving LO is to get us money we might as well skip it. The important thing is to reach out to unions and union activists.*

Getting economic contributions is seen as valuable by the organisers, which Agneta points out. But other ideological and strategic values of the interaction with the labour movement are presented as more important by Lars. In his statement he emphasised the importance of not just having a financial relationship to LO, but of building personal relations with union activists. The will to 'reach' and 'involve' LO among activists, such as Lars, should be understood as a will to mobilise LO and their affiliated blue collar unions, which organise more than one and a half million workers and thus could be a significant potential ally in the struggle against neoliberalism. However, by tradition LO has been closely tied to the Social Democratic party, which at the time was in government; a government that had implemented several reforms influenced by neoliberal ideals that the social forums were challenging (cf. Ryner, 2002). Thus, when LO finally did choose to participate, both

formally and with active representatives in the organisation of the social forum, it was regarded as a success for the initiating organisers.

## **The social forum participants trust in institutionalised popular education**

What about the participants in the social forum event when it is finally organised? Based on the survey study (Wennerhag *et al.*, 2006) made at the social forums in Lund, Stockholm and Gothenburg in 2004, it is possible to see certain patterns in the participants' approach to institutionalised popular education. One way to ensure this relationship is to consider the extent to which participants take part in the activities, study circles and folk high school courses, conducted by popular education institutions.

In the questionnaire responses, it was revealed that 77 per cent of forum participants indicated that they had participated at least once in a study circle, which is in line with the average proportion of the Swedish population as a whole. But as many as 41 per cent said they had participated in a circle in the past year, compared to the figure for the population as a whole of 26 per cent (Folkbildningsrådet, 2006, p. 12). The participants in the social forums are to a large degree also participants in study circles. The same applies to studies at folk high schools. As many as 33 per cent say they had participated at least once in a folk high school course, compared to the figure for the population as a whole, which is 12 per cent (Jonsson and Gähler, 1995, p. 15).

Based on the survey one cannot discern whether participation in study circles and folk high school courses takes place prior to participating in the global justice movement, or vice versa. However, one can conclude that these forms of participation are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, there is a considerable overlap between the two types of activities.

In the survey study the forum participants were also asked about their trust in different actors and institutions. One question was about 'study associations and think tanks on the left (e.g., LO-idédebatt and ABF)'. The question, which was formulated in order to identify possible differences in trust in relation to different parts of the labour movement, can also be used as an indicator of confidence in popular education institutions. Forum participants expressed a relatively high level of trust in study associations. Participants generally have a significantly higher

confidence in study associations and think tanks on the left (67 per cent have quite a large/great confidence) than for example in the media (only 12 per cent), legal services (30 per cent), LO (34 per cent) or political parties (33 per cent).

Overall, it is reasonable to suggest that the activists involved in, and those who organise, the social forums in Sweden view ABF as something other than a representative of a dominant order, or as part of an establishment, which they distrust. They distinguish between ABF and the political parties, but also between ABF and LO. Thus, it is not solely the inflow of financial and material resources that should be considered when understanding the ABF's participation in the emergence of social forums. These resources are certainly important to those less fortunate organisations (such as ATTAC), but the development must also be considered in light of an experience of trust and a feeling of community in relation to the ABF.

### **ABF's inclusion of the global justice movement's political themes**

So what kind of relationship does the old popular education institution express in relation to the new global justice movement? ABF is in itself a complex umbrella organisation consisting of several parts and organisations, which makes it difficult to comment on all of these. But it is striking that the global justice movement has influenced popular education institutions, at least regarding the ideological rhetoric of the central level of the organisation. A telling example is the latest ideological platform of ABF, adopted in May 2006 and still in force, entitled 'Make another world possible', which alludes to the global justice movement's main slogan 'another world is possible'. In this platform, the relationship is very explicit. It is underlined that ABF 'need to learn more about and participate in the new resistance that is emerging in the international solidarity and justice movement' (ABF, 2006a, p. 22). In addition, it is stated that:

*ABF will be part of the global justice movement. In cooperation with new and established movements, within and beyond national boundaries, we want to link the local and global struggles for justice and democracy. (ABF, 2006a, p. 22)*

The ABF central website has communicated a similar message. In the following example, which is presented on the website in a news format as an illustration of the various activities ABF is engaged in around the country, the local social forum in Lund is described.

*Social forums which aspire for a new world order are now available worldwide. On 3–5 February Lund is for the third time filled with workshops, seminars, lectures and culture. ABF is of course a part of this.* (ABF, 2006c)

The social forums are not described as something obscure on the periphery of the organisation's range of activities, but as a natural event for ABF to take part in. On the ABF website, in September 2006, a report was published on the study circles' nationwide organisation on the theme of WSF and global justice:

*ABF is organising a group trip to the World Social Forum in Kenya. Participation in the Forum will be combined with visits to various organisations and projects.*

*The trip is linked to preparatory study circles organised by ABF departments in several cities in the country. Participants will jointly learn more about the issues that are often discussed at the WSF, such as globalisation and global justice, and look closely at the situation in Africa in relation to global development.*

(ABF, 2006d)

It is not just on the web page that activities related to the WSF have been highlighted. The ABF's annual report for 2005 devoted two pages to a report from a trip to Porto Alegre that ABF employees had been involved in during the year. The report from the world social forum is written as a journalistic article and is illustrated with pictures. Again, it is clear that ABF is presenting itself as being a part of the movement behind the social forum.

*Along with over 100,000 people from around the world ABF attended the huge demonstration for justice, solidarity, equality and peace that started the forum.* (ABF, 2006b, p. 27)

These examples show how the global justice movement's major issues, its symbolic meeting places and language, have become included in ABF's self-presentation – and field of operation. ABF has been influenced by – and implemented – the global justice movement political themes in a way that marks an ideological affinity with this new movement.

ABF's close relationship to the global justice movement has also, in critical terms, been highlighted by liberal and conservative public voices. The liberal political magazine *Neo* devoted a section of several pages to draw attention to this relationship, as described in the following:

*Forum: young [a similar type of forum held by ABF] and Skåne Social Forum was not the first time that the anti-democratic Left and ABF . . . tied their bonds together. ABF, the largest study association seen both in terms of members, activities, and government grants – in 2008 the government grant to ABF will amount to little more than 469 million crowns – have in recent years, several times, worked with or helped groups belonging to the extreme left. Apart from Suf [the syndicalist youth organization], and their related planka.nu, organizations such as the Revolutionary Communist Youth (RKU), and Workers' Power [Trotskyites] have also benefited from ABF's generosity.*

In an editorial in the conservative daily newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet*, based on the report in *Neo*, the writer Claes Arvidsson (2008) criticises how ABF involves itself with the 'touring travel companion against "market-driven globalisation", which usually fights against the police officers on streets when the World Trade Organisation has its meetings'. '[S]hould not the Social Democrats themselves be interested in making ABF to a less tumultuous meeting place', he asks rhetorically. Even the global justice movement's opponents have thus noticed – and have been shocked by – the interaction that occurs with parts of government funded popular education. In a response to this editorial, the chairperson of the ABF, Karl-Petter Thorwaldsson (2008), explained the position taken by his organisations in the following words:

*Our aim, when we organise events with organisations that may not be house-trained in democracy, is not to make them into 'good social democrats' but perhaps make them become good democrats when they get older, and not remain sheltered in their aversion against*

*society. This is not an irresponsible flirtation with extremists, we are convinced that dialogue is better than monologue – that debate is better than silence – that openness is better than secrecy.*

Consequently, the presence of radical, and sometimes even revolutionary groups at, for instance, social forums, where ABF appears as the organiser, should not be seen as an indication of the main position held by the study association. On the contrary, the organisation is dominated by social democrats, and the pluralist agenda explained in the quotation from the chairman above could of course be seen as a strategy to, in the long run, transform the most radical political elements into ‘good democrats’ within the borders of contemporary liberal democracy.

## **Discussion**

The results presented in this article show that the social forums in Sweden appear to be highly integrated into the general popular education system, both organisationally and financially, as well as rhetorically. There seems to be no significant conflict or clash of interest. Popular education institutions are key economic players in the emergence of social forums in Sweden, and there exists a great deal of trust in ABF among participants in the global justice movement. Additionally, it appears that there are also ideological and coalition strategic reasons for organisations such as ATTAC to interact with ABF. It is also clear that many of those involved in the social forums have been to folk high schools and participated in study circles. There is also a high degree of receptivity of the global justice movement’s themes, which to a significant degree has been integrated into the institutionalised popular education that ABF represents.

Given the image of conflicts, and the differences between old and new movements that are often presented by both researchers (an often cited example is Finger, 1989) and commentators, this interaction might be regarded as unexpected. However, the general idea that the old and new social movements, as well as activities and organisations connected with them, would be very different from each other is problematic (Holst, 2011). There is often a too highly simplified polarisation between ‘new’ movements and ‘old’ movements in sociological research focusing on new social movements (Thörn, 2002, pp. 159–160). It has been pointed out by several researchers (Scott, 1990; Spencer, 1995) that there

are great similarities between the so-called new and old movements in terms of organisation, learning environments and identity processes, and it is even doubtful whether it is sociologically adequate to make a distinction between them.

For ABF and the global justice movement's social forums, there were indeed points of contact, both in practice and in political orientation. Educational methods such as seminars and lectures, and the emphasis on the conflict between labour and capital, are crucial for both parties. One can also note that when the global social forum phenomenon was established in Sweden, this was named and framed by both actors and observers as popular education, i.e. *folkbildning* (Nordvall, 2002). The relationship has thus been constructed between a national historical tradition of popular education (in the form of study circles, folk high schools and lectures) and a global phenomenon that can be traced to Latin America, and Porto Alegre, where it first started.

Although ABF, in its ideological platform and in parts of its activities, has joined the global justice movement, it is important to emphasise that the labour movement in Sweden (as elsewhere) is not homogeneous. Adrienne Sörbom (2005), for example, has shown that the perception of globalisation among representatives at a local level within the labour movement is largely consistent with the neoliberal concept of globalisation as an inevitable economic process, which forces workers in different countries to compete instead of seeing globalisation as something that increases the need for global movements and international solidarity. Magnus Ryner (2002) describes how the social democratic leadership in Sweden during the 1990s was marked by a corresponding neoliberal orientation in thinking and action.

Finally, can the interaction be characterised as a stronger counter-hegemonic mobilisation or as a neutralising process of cooption? On the one hand, the global justice movement gains both financial and political support through its interaction with the institutionalised popular education that ABF represents. This would most likely increase its impact and influence as a project that intends to challenge what is perceived to be a neoliberal hegemony. On the other hand, if we consider the study associations' fundamental dependence on state subsidies, and regard ABF and the popular education system as a (indirect) part of the state administration (cf. Lindgren, 1999), the interaction can also be interpreted as an expression of cooption.

Studies of cooption as a phenomenon have emphasised that public

administration often hopes that, by incorporating external movements, ‘an aura of respectability’ will be transferred from the coopted movements to the administrative organisation (Sunesson, 1989, p. 407). The integration of the global justice movement into the popular education sector can, from this perspective, be seen as an example of this, in that the extended public administration (ABF) is dependent on having an element of radicalism, as this (ideological profiling) is one of the government’s conditions for subsidies to popular educations institutions (Folkbildningsrådet 2012, p. 8). To legitimise their existence, study associations such as ABF must demonstrate that they are different from general and formal adult education, i.e. that they have a specific ideological profile.

Hence, the integration of the global justice movement’s political themes, and the support to and participation in this movement’s activities, could be interpreted as a process of cooption in which the legitimacy of the popular education system is a result. Although this might also be seen as a win-win situation, i.e. the social movement has developed its political orientation, which ABF has subscribed to, it also benefits by presenting itself as alternative to mainstream adult education provision. However, this type of cooption, where movements ‘lend’ their radical political aura to public (in this case semi-public) institutions, has sometimes resulted elsewhere in a shift in the movements’ and organisations’ political orientation to a less conflict-oriented one, with more modest claims for change, and more marginalisation of radical groups. Something else which occurred is that movement organisations have turned to professional organisations working on behalf of the state, as happened in parts of the environmental movement, as well as in non-profit organisations working with social issues (Boström, 2000; Meeuwisse and Sunesson, 1998). Popular education with a focus on global justice has been, since the 2006 government bill (Proposition 2005/06:192, pp. 43), i.e. the policy document that regulates and sets the agenda for the popular education sector, one (of several) prescribed activities that justifies government grants to study associations and folk high schools. This government bill, which was written by a social democratic government, but was implemented by the central-liberal government that took office in the fall of 2006, is still the one regulating the popular education sector. This development of the global justice movement, which is similar to that of social organisations and parts of the environmental movement, indicates a form of cooption. However, it

is also important not to limit the analysis to this aspect, i.e. reducing the interaction to a matter of cooption.

In the case of the global justice movement, it should perhaps especially be seen in the light of contemporary global capitalism. Today market forces and multinational corporations act on a global scale and neither nation states nor social movements have succeeded in mobilising a clear counterbalance. This will reasonably make other conflict dimensions more central than that between state and civil society.

Instead, we can imagine a line of conflict cutting through both civil society and the state, which generates unexpected coalitions. Pierre Bourdieu (1998) has remarked that in the struggle against neoliberalism the conflict line is not necessarily between, say, government offices and social movements, it is rather between the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Social Affairs (or for that matter the Ministry of Education), which ally themselves in different directions with forces in both the private sector and civil society. There are examples of how other social movements in Sweden have created corresponding ‘cross-cutting’ lines of conflict. Magnus Boström (2000) shows how parts of the state administration (Ministry of Environment) interact with and seek support from the environmental movement in negotiations with other parts of the state administration.

As the popular education system, represented by the ABF, is already a driver in the initial stages of the emergence of social forums in Sweden, the relationship should not be seen as a gradual incorporation of a new movement in an established order, as is the case when talking about cooption. Institutionalised popular education is rather one of the forces that has contributed to the shaping of the global justice movement’s social forum from the start in Sweden.

There are reasons to problematise the popular notions about the relationship between state and civil society as a relationship between a monolithic device that monitors the status quo and a free zone where radical actors can work for social change. This concept, which can be discerned even in the previously cited platform for WSF, implies a sharp distinction between a morally good sphere (cf. Stubbegaard, 1998) and on the other hand, a state which constantly threatens to intervene in and control individuals’ and voluntary associations’ activities.

Both the notion of civil society as a free zone beyond the exercise of power and the very idea of a clearly discernible boundary is questionable. John Ehrenberg (1999, p. 249) emphasises, for example,

that civil society is also characterised by coercion, exclusion and inequality, and that this sphere can be used to serve all kinds of interests. Also, state integrated activities can be related to different interests, as discussed above. The boundary between these spheres is not obvious. The extensive and partially fragmented prison notes of Antonio Gramsci contain the following arguments that oppose a static division between state and civil society:

*The approach of the free trade movement is based on a theoretical error whose practical origin is not hard to identify: namely the distinction between political society and civil society, which is made into and presented as an organic one, whereas in fact it is merely methodological. Thus it is asserted that economic activity belongs to civil society, and that the state must not intervene to regulate it. But since in actual reality civil society and state are one and the same, it must be made clear that laissez-faire too is a form of 'state regulation', introduced and maintained by legislative and coercive means. It is a deliberate policy, conscious of its own ends, and not the spontaneous, automatic expression of economic facts. (Gramsci, 1988, p. 210)*

The separation between civil society and state should be seen as a methodological one rather than as an empirical fact, according to Gramsci in this reasoning, as well as the division being seen as politically and ideologically created in accordance with various interests and forces. If a state subsidised system has developed to integrate the activities of a social movement, it should not be reduced to a matter of cooption or contamination, a 'pure' resistance. If the state closes down a support system that indirectly finances such activities, it does not mean that movements are released from state control. The absence of formal governmental regulatory regimes and funding, what Gramsci called laissez-faire, can also be seen as a strategy for controlling the development of political organisations and social movements. One consequence of such a policy could, for example, be that not for profit organisations are oriented more towards the private sector. This may in turn mean that the activities will be adapted to the expectations from corporate sponsors or result in higher fees, which might exclude important social groups.

The interaction between the new social forums and old popular

education practices and institutions in Sweden described in the present study underlines the need to problematise assumed conflicts between new and old movements, as well as this distinction in itself. Neither must there necessarily arise any conflicts between state integrated organisations and new emerging social movements. There could very well be coalitions between organisations in the struggle against neoliberalism that cut across the state–civil society dichotomy. However, historical factors should be considered here. Sweden does have a long tradition of cooperation between the state and popular movements, which typifies the Swedish version of the so-called corporate state (Rothstein, 1992). An authoritarian state, with a lesser degree of contact with popular movements, would probably create less space for such cross cutting coalitions.

It is, however, too early to say if the extensive interaction illustrated in this article will improve the counter-hegemonic mobilisation of the movement for global justice, or if it will reduce its impact through a process of neutralising cooption. The consequences in terms of social and ideological change cannot be determined due to the short time this movement has existed, and is, therefore, a question for future research.

Although today it may look like the global justice movement has declined radically in Sweden during the last years, and the organisation of social forums seems to have peaked in the mid 2000s, the impact of the movement when it comes to transforming the hegemonic neoliberal consent might very well be seen as significant in retrospect. Some indications can perhaps be seen even at this moment. In May 2012, at its national congress, LO – the Swedish Trade Union Confederation that entered the social forum process quite late – declared for the first time that they, in contrast to the Social Democratic Party, were against letting private profiteers operate within the tax-funded welfare sector (Berglund, 2012). It might also be worth keeping in mind that if the European economic crisis, now escalating in Greece, spreads further north, the relations and coalitions built during the social forum process might form a most relevant platform for further mobilisation. Also, the efforts within the social forum process to develop and spread ideas about alternatives to neoliberal economic politics might have a pay off, as it seems to become more and more obvious that something radical must be done to counteract the present capitalist crisis. Maybe this indicates that a new, or at least a transformed, hegemonic consensus is emerging.

## Notes

- 1 The MGJ is also known as the ‘anti-globalisation movement’ or ‘the movements of movements’.
- 2 The Swedish state is characterised by its tradition of involving several interest groups (trade unions, employers’ organisations, etc.) in public administration. The model is often referred to as the ‘Swedish corporate state’ (Rothstein, 1992, pp. 173–191).
- 3 In Gramsci’s own writings the central role of the working class and the leading role of the communist party is emphasised, as well as the material aspects of the political struggle (see Holst, 2002). However, in the more revisionist neo-Gramscian interpretation used here, the idea of an ongoing war of position is regarded as a useful tool to discuss radical social and political struggle more generally (see Carroll and Rahtner, 1994).
- 4 ATTAC (Association pour la Taxation des Transactions pour l’Aide aux Citoyens) is a worldwide organisation with its origins in France, which devotes itself to a wide range of issues related to globalisation and criticism of neoliberal ideological dominance. ATTAC was one of the organisations to initiate the first world social forum and in Sweden the organisation has also been an initiating force when it comes to organising local social forums.
- 5 LO is the central organisation for 15 affiliates, which together have 1.8 million (working class) members. The representatives are from the local organisation.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

# **Popular education in the service of integration: Empowerment or internalisation of the dominant cultural ethos?**

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*Ali Osman*

### **Introductory background**

The pattern of immigration to Sweden from the 1940s can divide into three phases: 1) refugees from Denmark, Norway and Finland fleeing the war between 1940 and 1948. At the end of the war there was a substantial flotilla of refugees that fled from Baltic countries to Sweden. 2) Labour immigration: The reconstruction of Europe after the Second World War created a demand for manpower that could not be met locally, and Swedish industries recruited labour primarily from the Nordic countries, Germany and Italy, in the beginning. By the 1960s, Swedish industries extended labour recruitment to Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey to meet the needs of the Swedish industries. This period of labour immigration lasted from 1949–1972. In 1972 non-Nordic labour immigration was stopped. 3) From 1972 onwards the major form of immigration to Sweden has been through asylum and family reunification. This form of immigration and resettlement is still on-going and the pattern and character of refugees to Sweden generally reflect on-going conflicts in the world. For instance, in the 1970s, the majority of asylum seekers in Sweden consisted of Iranians fleeing the Islamic revolution, while in the 1990s, the majority of refugees in Sweden were the result of the Balkan

wars and the conflict in the horn of Africa, particularly Somalia, as well as from Afghanistan and Iraq.

In this context it is important to stress that from the onset of labour immigration to the mid-1960s, the social implication of immigration was not addressed. In 1975, Sweden adopted a radical policy of multiculturalism (Ålund and Schierup, 1991; Westin, 2000; 2003). This policy recognised that the majority of immigrants and asylum seeker would permanently settle in the country. The first pillar of the policy was equality. Foreign citizens with a permanent residency permit were accorded the same basic economic, social and educational rights, and the right to vote in local elections as native Swedes. The second pillar in this policy was freedom of choice. Choice implies and gives immigrants as individuals, or a collective, the right to take the Swedish culture or develop their cultural identity/practices, as long as it did not compromise Swedish values (for a detail discussion of this policy see Ålund and Schierup, 1991; Westin, 2000; 2003). The third pillar of this policy was partnership and, according to Westin (2003, p. 2): ‘Migrants and their organizations were expected to actively participate at all levels in the governance of Swedish society.’

In 1997, the multicultural policy briefly delineated above was revised and a policy of integration was introduced. The weakening of multicultural policy and the introduction of the Swedish integration policy reflected a change in the discourse on immigration in the 1980s. The policy introduced a variety of intervention and compensatory measures targeting immigrants and their children. The policy was slightly revised in 2006. The policy envisions a Swedish society in which everyone is active and takes responsibility. The objective of the first policy of integration was to ensure justice and equal opportunities for all groups/individuals in Swedish society, irrespective of ethnic or cultural background. The revision of the policy emphasised individual responsibility, equal rights and obligation irrespective of background. It also emphasised mutual respect for difference, but within the context of Swedish society’s fundamental democratic values. Its focus is a community-based diversity, and a society characterised by tolerance and mutual respect. The focus of the revised policy emphasised measures to eliminate obstacles and create equal opportunity for all. It stresses active measures and initiatives in the first one or two years for new arrivals that have been accorded permanent residence. After two years the policy stresses that there is no need for initiatives that specifically target immigrants.

Irrespective of the slight differences and focus of the policy noted above, it is essential to stress that the policy of integration is a scaffold for different compensatory measures that target immigrants. One initiative which all Swedish institutions are expected to design and implement is the development of a diversity policy, which is now a legal requirement. The focus of the policy is on barriers and capacity of immigrants to integrate in Sweden. Irrespective of the recent changes in the Swedish policy of integration, it is essential to stress that the institutional compensatory/intervention measure reflects the dominant and shared cognitive map of how the exclusion and inclusion of immigrants is imagined.

The focus of this chapter is on examining how popular education in Sweden conceptualises its function and role in facilitating the social inclusion of immigrants. My interest is to delineate how the institutions of popular education (study associations, such as the Workers' Educational Association (ABF), and similar institutions) cooperate with immigrant associations and consider the exclusion of immigrants and problematise this by applying theoretical insights from postcolonial and antiracist theory (Gilroy, 1987; Hall, 1997). However, to grasp the response of popular education in this process, it is crucial to delineate and to understand the language and the core ideas that underlie and inform the practice of popular education in general. Therefore, in the first section of this chapter, I will briefly present how different institutions of popular education perceive their role in facilitating the integration/inclusion of immigrants in Swedish society. This is followed by a brief description of the study circle as a phenomenon. Finally, I will summarise and discuss the main themes that I have identified in my analysis. It is essential from the outset to stress that popular education in this chapter refers to educational activities organised by study associations.

The empirical content is based on seven interviews with individuals in leadership positions at district level in different study associations in three major cities in Sweden: Malmö, Gothenburg and Norrköping. I also examined a number of different policy documents of the major popular education associations such as ABF, governmental directives, white papers, etc. The interviews were open ended, but focused on the cooperation between immigrant organisations and study associations, how this cooperation was organised at the time of the interview, and how institutionalised popular education experienced their cooperation

with immigrant associations. In this study, our interviews were based on the perception of immigrants of traditional Swedish study associations in their encounters with non-European immigrant associations. It is important from the start to stress that the chapter deals with a specific aspect of the complex and multilayered relationship between traditional institutions of popular education and immigrant associations. That is, the focus of this chapter is on the rhetorical level of this relationship, i.e. how the relationship is described by representatives of popular education institutions and in policy documents. When problematising this rhetoric, drawing on postcolonial theoretical insights, the aspects focused on are power relations and processes of marginalisation within the field of popular education. In addition, not all immigrant associations cooperate with study associations, and more importantly the relationships between immigrant associations is pragmatic. It has very little to do with the ideological orientations of the traditional Swedish associations which the immigrant associations cooperate with. The concern of the majority of immigrant associations is which traditional associations provide them with the best conditions and support to help them organise different types of activities (Eriksson and Osman, 2003).

Historically, popular education, particularly study circles organised by study associations, functioned as an arena to empower, and change the mindset of the workers, to enable them to participate in the democratic dialogue, assume leadership roles in government and in different sectors of Swedish society (Arvidson, 2004; Sundgren, 2003). This historical role is used by the traditional institutions of popular education to inform and legitimise their controlling function and relationship in relation to immigrant associations. The central question in this process, as Biesta in his inaugural speech states:

*... is whether the good citizen is the one who fits in, the one who goes with the flow, the one who is part of the whole, or whether the good citizen is the one who stands out from the crowd, the one who goes against the flow, the one who bucks the trend, as they say in English, and who, in a sense, is always slightly 'out of order'. . . . It first of all depends on whether one sees citizenship primarily as a social identity, having to do with one's place and role in the life of society, or whether one sees citizenship primarily as a political identity, having to do with the relationships amongst individuals and individuals and the state, with their rights and duties, and*

*with their participation in collective deliberation and decision making*  
(Biesta, 2011, p. 1).

I will argue that the relationship between immigrant associations and popular education institutions is characterised by a perception of difference (cultural), and the function and role of popular education institutions – the traditional Swedish institutions of popular education (primarily study associations) – is to impart skills to immigrants and immigrant associations to enable them to partake in the sociopolitical order of Swedish society. But, as I will show later, this skill and knowledge is culturalised (a cultural disposition that is intrinsic in the dominant culture) and immigrants may come from cultures that lack these traditions and skills.

## Theoretical perspective

The analysis of the empirical data is inspired by a number of perspectives from Foucault and from theorists such as Stuart Hall, Gilroy, etc. The Foucauldian concepts that I am inspired by, in the analysis of the empirical data in this study, is the order of discourse and how this order includes and excludes the other. The notion of discourse is understood or viewed as assertions that are shared and are dominant or hegemonic in a specific context *vis a vis* a social or institutional practice. In this context, it examines how institutions of popular education construct their practice and role in working with immigrants and immigrant associations. The order of discourse, in simple terms, defines the ‘valid knowledge’ which immigrants should acquire, in other words, what the immigrants have to internalise to be included in the fraternity of the popular education community, and in the final analysis Swedish society. To put it simply, this order of discourse defines and normalises specific norms and values in specific contexts and functions to identify and differentiate the norm from the abnormal, the sane from the insane (Foucault, 1993). The cooperation of popular education with immigrant associations, as I will show later, is informed by a language of difference, a difference that departs from the norm, which the other (immigrants) are evaluated against and gaps are identified between the other and the norm and this is perceived as a problem.

One of the social practices that is central and critical to the encounter between popular education and immigrant associations is democratic

culture and norms which popular education actors stress are required to participate in Swedish society and which some immigrants are perceived to lack because they come from a ‘culture’ that is undemocratic. Thus, cultural plurality, which is often associated with immigration, is perceived as a problem, which threatens social stability and has to be addressed. This area, as noted briefly earlier, is perceived by popular education actors as their area of expertise, and is used by institutions of popular education to legitimise their role in Swedish society.

However, in this context it is important to stress that the construction of cultural otherness of non-European immigrants has long historical roots. The encounter between the ‘west’ and the ‘rest’ is shaped not only by the ‘white’ and ‘black’ dichotomy. This relationship has been full of different meanings. Historically, the white and black dichotomy has been a structuring factor. In other words, ‘race’ has been a factor that determined one’s place in the social ladder of the colonial world. An extreme form of this practice is the apartheid system, whereby certain innate abilities are attributed to race (a perverse implementation of this idea was the apartheid practised in South Africa, before it was abolished). This perception, that the white–black dichotomy and relationship was an expression or reflection of levels of civilisation, permeated western thinking from the seventeenth century until the first half of the twentieth century. According to Gilroy (1987), among others, the ordering of human beings into races based on phenotypical features was the basis on which nonwhites were discriminated against and excluded, subordinated and exploited. However, in the past two or three decades, many scholars have stressed that there has been a shift from ‘race’ to ‘cultural difference’ to legitimise the exclusion of nonwhite immigrants in western democracies.

The institutionalisation of this relationship, based on cultural differences, has been examined by a number of authors. They emphasise that the perceptions of difference impact, often negatively, on the position of non-European immigrants in European countries today. O’Brien and Penna (1998, p. 198) similarly note in this context:

*The cultural rootedness of the imperial encounter underpins both the official and the unofficial dimension of European social development. Access to services, opportunities in the labour markets, the distribution of social and cultural statuses, division between private and public duties and obligations draw their social power from the historic*

*structuring of racialised, gendered and stratified imperialism and not from the abstract universalisation of rational principles.*

This cultural deficit of certain groups of immigrants, as noted earlier, is constructed as a social problem, which can be corrected through enlightening the ‘other’ – the civilising and modernising project of non-European cultures. Thus, one can argue that popular education work, cooperation and dialogue with immigrants and immigrant associations are but a continuation of the modern project of popular education elites and actors who work with the ‘natives’ within. The work of popular education institutions can be compared to the precolonial and colonial missionaries working with ‘natives abroad’, who acknowledged the natives but at the same time had the objective of convincing them to abandon their ways and act ‘white’ in order to be saved. This knowledge and power, I would like to stress, is a good illustration of Edward Said’s notion of Orientalism, which is conceptualised as a codification and reproduction of knowledge of people or the world under colonial rule and its ‘return effect on the codification and production of knowledge about the metropolitan poor; the native within rather than the native without’ (Crosskill, 2000, p. 52).

The cultural difference or ‘otherness’ of immigrants (particularly non-European ethnic groups) has been challenged from different perspectives (see the writings in this field by Stuart Hall (1997) for example). In Sweden, Aleksandra Ålund and Carl-Ulrik Schierup (1991) have similarly criticised the cultural paradigm in understanding and explaining the exclusion of ethnic minority groups/individuals. Despite the existence of a mass of literature critical of this paradigm, it is evident from this study that it is still a major perspective in understanding and explaining the exclusion of immigrants and the dominant paradigm informing the response of popular education. Finally, I would like to stress that the cultural deficit paradigm also serves to hierarchise different categories of immigrants, naturalising and homogenising the difference that is constructed, as was also noted by O’Brien and Penna (1998). But more importantly, the difference that is constructed in this process is given meaning in terms of capacity, function and position.

## **The study circle as a phenomenon**

Many researchers and practitioners in popular education point out that study circles are free from interventions of various power interests and as a consequence participants in study circles are generally highly motivated (Sundgren, 2001). People do not participate in study circles to improve their positions in the labour market by learning new production techniques or by accumulating points or merits to progress into higher education. Hence, the free and voluntary character of the practice, coupled with the lack of sanctions and evaluation, allows participants, in theory, to influence the contents of the curriculum and to participate in these circles as equals. But it is important to qualify this statement. Sundgren (2001), for instance, stresses that participation and interest in participating in and organising study circles varies, and is dependent on the actor:

*For the state, the study circle's raison d'être is its ability to strengthen the democratic process; for the study association it may be its contribution to a specific social movement or just maintaining the volume of activity within the association. For the participants themselves, it is often the chance to deepen a specific interest in a social setting, together with people who share this specific interest* (Sundgren, 2001, p. 10).

Thus, for the state and the institutions of popular education, popular education is generally perceived as an arena for the production of pluralism and to encourage and stimulate broad political and civil activism. This function of popular education, as an organiser of pluralism, is partly expected to be conducted within the accepted democratic framework, or rules of the game. In other words, the production of pluralism in the encounter with immigrants, I would suggest, has a socialising and controlling function in relation to maintaining and reproducing a democratic ethos (the rule of the game of political organisation, political activism and participation). In this process there is a very limited space for questioning the nature of the democratic order in operation or the status quo, and ultimately the social order, as in the early years of popular education. In other words, I would like to stress that institutionalised popular education today often functions as the invisible and extended arm of the state. The project, therefore, is to educate and change the behaviour and attitudes of the population *vis a vis* a specific social phe-

nomenon and, in the case of immigrants, to internalise a desired cultural disposition. In other words, immigrants and immigrant associations are expected to embody a Swedish ‘culture’ of democratic practice.

Thus for immigrants to establish an association they have to fulfill specific criteria, to have the skills or competence to run the association, but more importantly they have to acknowledge certain norms or values in this process. In other words, to be acknowledged and registered as an association, immigrant associations (but in this context it is important to point out that this applies equally to Swedes and immigrants) have to fulfil certain criteria. The associations have, among other things, to show and acknowledge their democratic credentials in order to be eligible for financial assistance to fund their activities. In other words, their objectives have to be compatible with certain democratic ideals – what they organise, and which traditional Swedish study association they chose to cooperate with, is a matter between the two parties. The democratic functions of popular education have been examined in a number of studies (Sundgren, 1998). Hartman (1999) and Larsson (1999) have examined the democratic contribution of study circles to local communities. In a number of articles, Sundgren has analysed the contribution of Swedish popular education to active citizenship. However, there are no studies in the field that have examined the role of popular education in the process of socialisation and making immigrants into citizens. This is particularly important in light of the fact that a number of studies have shown that people typified as generally different often tend to internalise the identity ascribed to them by the dominant ‘others’ (Olsson, 1995; Ronström, 1992).

However, collective identity and identification have been a basis for collective action. Examples of these forms of political organisations that are based on perception of a common identity are: civil rights movements, feminist movements and working class movements (Eriksson and Osman, 2003). ‘Immigrants’ often organise themselves in Sweden within the framework of associations that are either ethnically or religiously based and organise activities for their members. These activities are often intended to facilitate the transition or inclusion of ethnic minority groups/individuals into Swedish society. The process of civic education and citizenship making takes place, no doubt, in different institutions (such as schools, labour unions and political parties – the established and formal democratic structures), and these institutions not only complement each other but also compete with each other.

Popular education in Sweden, from the perspective of the state, is to strengthen democratic dialogue, civic activism and civic education – the embodiment or internalisation of a democratic ethos, not the questioning of the social order or power relationships, as in its golden years (Sundgren, 2000). In the empirical part of this chapter, I will show how the institutions of popular education take part in a cultural project that homogenises what in reality is a multifaceted and diverse experience of different groups in society (Corrigan and Derek, 1985). Thus, the institutions of popular education have become an extension of the state and participate in the state's project of universalising citizenship through a process of dilution of any forms of dialogue that are intended to impart certain desirable norms and values of different social categories in the nation. In this process, individuals are 'grouped' by categorical social formation as: citizens, immigrants (foreigners of different categories), welfare dependents, single mothers, etc., and are subjected to an institutional intervention, which attempts to shape their behaviour and attitudes in a specific direction, for instance becoming a democratic subject.

### **To organise ethnic minority immigrants**

In the following statements, it is apparent that popular education practitioners construct the primary role of the institution, in relation to the inclusion of immigrants in Swedish society, as the organisation and mobilisation of the immigrant communities. The objective of this mobilisation, as explicitly stated in the following policy recommendations and directives, is to facilitate dialogue between the two social groups. It is, however, stressed that in order to achieve a meaningful dialogue, it is essential, first and foremost, to create the structures and conditions that foster dialogue between immigrants and the dominant society. This means creating and organising meeting places or social arenas and, as implicit in the statements below, providing immigrants with the necessary skills to participate in the dialogue. These include: (a) providing immigrants with opportunities to enhance and improve their communication skills in Swedish; (b) internalising, in the group, certain norms, values, etc. and knowledge of how Swedish society functions; (c) providing ethnic minority associations with the opportunity to maintain and reproduce their language and culture.

*The task of popular education is said to make it possible for individuals and groups to improve their living conditions and vitalize their participation. It is also to work to create various forms of arena and bridges between different groups and cultures in Sweden in order to facilitate the integration of ethnic minorities in society (Eriksson and Osman, 2003, p. 14).*

Similarly, the government bill on popular education and the decree on government subsidies to popular education stresses that the different institutions of popular education should function as arenas for dialogue and in this process language, or to be precise the key for mutual understanding, tolerance and integration, is the acquisition of Swedish language skills.

*. . . can contribute to integration – unite different people around similar interests, which offer opportunities for improving language skills and for gaining knowledge and insights about other people's culture (Proposition 1997/98:115) [Government bill].*

*Activity that aims at equalising educational gaps and raising the educational level in society are to be given priority as well as activities that are focused on persons educationally, socially and culturally deprived. Persons of foreign background, participants with disabilities and unemployed comprise especially important target groups for the state (Decree on Government Subsidies to Popular Education, SFS 1991:977 revised 1998:973).*

In the above statements, the objective of the dialogue is to address the intolerance of mainstream society *vis a vis* immigrants and to provide immigrants with the necessary skills to participate in public dialogue, and to compete in the labour market. In participating in these activities language is considered to be the magic wand, without which immigrants face exclusion in Swedish society. The purpose of the dialogue is to foster mutual respect and tolerance between immigrant communities and mainstream society which it is assumed will facilitate the inclusion of immigrants in the existing social structure of Swedish society. Embedded in the notion of tolerance of the cultural other is an essentialist perspective on culture and a cultural assessment of different immigrant groups *vis a vis* their adaptability to Swedish norms, values

and practices. In the above quotations, it is implicit that organising immigrants does not mean mobilising marginalised communities and groups to demand their social rights or challenge the dominant power structures. The purpose of mobilising immigrants and the notion of dialogue stressed in this process are to transmit Swedish cultural values, particularly in the case of popular education, a culturally bound view of democracy. Integration, and the notion of dialogue, is a one-way process of change rather than a mutually constitutive learning process, whereby the host society and migrants are expected to accommodate and learn from each other and the objective in this diluted form of dialogue is social cohesion.

### **Popular education in relation to immigrant associations**

Cultural difference and poor levels of ability of immigrants in Swedish are constructed by institutions of popular education as the root causes of exclusion of immigrants in Swedish society. This interpretation of the institutions is part of common knowledge and understanding about the exclusion of immigrants. This perception is not unique to popular education institutions. The exclusion of non-European immigrants in Sweden generally is attributed to different forms of deficit. Swedish studies (it is important to stress that Sweden is not unique in this discourse) perceive the poor performance of the descendants of immigrants in education and the labour market as a consequence of the combination of different deficits: language, lack of relevant cultural capital of the parents, educational norms and family expectations, discrimination, etc. (Crul and Heering, 2008; Osman, 2006). For instance, in this debate it is often emphasised that the poor performance of 'immigrant' children in the educational system is primarily rooted in their language ability. This is often attributed in part to the concentration of ethnic minority groups in certain residential areas and schools, the 'cultural expectation of parents in relation to education etc.' (Portes and Fernandez-Kelly, 2008).

Thus, language and culture are two sides of the same coin that are alternatively or simultaneously used to explain the exclusion of ethnic minority immigrant groups and individuals, depending on the context. It is, therefore, reasonable that this institutionalised understanding of the exclusion of immigrants is used by institutions (in this case, popular education) as a point of departure and informs the response of Swedish

institutions. Popular education is not unique in this understanding of the root causes of the exclusion of immigrants in Swedish society. The cultural deficit paradigm in operation in the relationship between immigrants and the institutions of the dominant society and the role of popular education is implicit in the statement below by the ABF programme director. For instance, he points out that that the quality of the activities organised in ethnic immigrant associations is not important, but the important thing is for immigrants to understand and internalise the democratic rules of the game and to be incorporated into the existing democratic structures of Swedish society. In this context, it is important to stress that the 'group' the director is talking about is not the Norwegians, Danes, etc., but immigrants from non-European countries.

*I don't think that we will have a Latin American party, rather all in Sweden irrespective of ethnicity should become a part of the regular democratic structure, but that training should take place in their own ethnic associations. This gives them the opportunity to influence the future of the Swedish society and thus this training has to be structured, preferably by us on the basis of our customs and from our perspective or together about why and how with their preconditions and it may take twenty years. (Programme Director ABF)*

Hence, from the perspective of the institutional actors, the function of popular education is to help immigrants, particularly those from non-European countries, internalise the Swedish democratic ethos. However, as is apparent from the above, the democratic ethos is fundamentally constructed as 'Swedish' or as synonymous with Swedish cultural tradition. This perception, explicit in the above and following statements, is attributed to, or rooted in, the cultural difference of these groups. The linking of culture to deficit values, ethos and competence in a specific activity serves not only to homogenise a diverse group but also to subject the group thus defined to control measures. The culturalisation of values, democratic or otherwise, and attribution of these to specific groups is used in this case to legitimise the marginalisation and subordination of the association of foreign-born immigrants to the traditional study association, as is implicit in the following statements.

*To be able to read just and work in new organisations. Meet the requirements formulated in government bills concerning being able to facilitate integration, increase democratisation. This involves people who do not traditionally organise in organisations in which it is possible to directly influence through democratic procedures: politics, unions and tenant associations. The classic organisations for developing, influencing one's situation without organising in this way as in the Somalian association or in the Greek association or in the Latin American association. It does not always lead to increased integration or democratisation. So, therefore we feel it is important to work with this. (ABF Programme Director).*

*The purpose of Dallos [A name we gave to an immigrant association which this study association cooperates with to anonymise the association] activity is to improve the opportunities for the individual to participate . . . an important contribution to democracy . . . working forms that place the participants in the centre. We start from their preconditions and experiences. This requires active joint influence and responsibility on the part of the participants. (Programme Director of the Study Promotion Association – Studiefrämjandet).*

But the exclusion of ethnic minority groups/individuals from the decision making process is a dilemma for many traditional popular education institutions. All study associations have founding members and cooperating associations (ABF has 60 member associations and 57 associations which they cooperate with at national level). ABF cooperates with about 70 immigrant associations in Malmö. However, during the time we conducted this study many immigration associations were not represented in the decision-making organs of ABF at local and regional levels. Despite this exclusion, the programme director points out that a significant volume of the activities of ABF target immigrant associations, and this, he emphasises, is a problem that the study associations have to address. However, the exclusion of ethnic minority associations is not unique to ABF at national level (however, it is important to point out that some immigrant associations are represented at national level, for instance, the older immigrant groups such as Greek and Iranian, to name a few). All of the institutional actors in the associations interviewed stressed that the exclusion of ethnic immigrant associations is a problem that contradicts the study

associations' images of themselves as standard-bearers of democratic working methods. In addition, they also stressed that the founding organisations lack strategies and policies for including immigrant associations in their decision-making processes.

The exclusion of immigrant associations from the decision-making organs of popular education institutions is partly attributed to the lack of stability in immigrant ethnic associations. However, it is important to qualify this statement, immigrant associations have a high rate of turnover, they change names, direction and can be passive for long periods. Hence, from the perspective of the institutions of popular education these circumstances make immigrant associations unreliable partners. However, in many cases this instability is a consequence of conflict among the leading actors in these associations or the communities they serve (Eriksson and Osman, 2003). This phenomenon is interpreted by the Swedish traditional study associations as a consequence of a lack of democratic traditions and culture among some immigrant communities. No doubt the life cycle of many associations is characterised by instability. But many active members of immigrant associations were active members of political associations in their countries of origin. Resistance movements in many Third World countries are local and democratic in structure, and without grassroots mobilisation and the support of the local population these movements would have practically no chance of surviving or of challenging the power structures in these societies (Osman, 2006). Hence, the very notion or idea of ethnic minority associations or actors lacking organisational competence or skill is problematic.

Thus, from the perspective of the traditional institutions of popular education, it is evident that the task of organising foreign-born immigrant groups does not mean organising the group to demand their rights as citizens or empowering ethnic minority groups and individuals, but rather organising them and encouraging them to internalise a democratic culture, tradition and ethos – under the supervision of the study associations. Hence, what ethnic minority associations organise, and the content of the activities organised by them, is irrelevant as long as it is an exercise in democratic practice and method. The process of exposing this ethos to these communities is stressed as being the priority of study associations. Thus, the notion of organising immigrants in the integration work of popular education does not mean, and is not intended, to involve empowering, enabling

or organising the ethnic minority groups to challenge the social order, but primarily socialising them into what is identified as democratic competence and coopting them into the existing democratic structure. In addition, the established institutions of popular education see ethnic minority groups as a potential source of recruitment to the activities of the traditional institutions of popular education, since the needs of their founding organisations for knowledge and information have declined considerably in recent years. Consequently, the ambition of certain ethnic minority groups to establish their own study associations is not particularly welcomed but rather resisted by the established traditional study associations. The exception is the newly established study association Ibn Rushd, an Islamic study association whose membership is composed of primarily different Islamic associations and organisations in Sweden.

But implicit in the typification of ‘the other’ as ‘culturally different’ from the dominant group, the different immigrant groups and individuals are homogenised, and differences within the groups are ignored. In addition, the difference is not only culturalised but also stigmatised. It is with these preconceptions that immigrants’ dispositions, lifestyles and abilities are assessed and that they are declared competent or incompetent and subjected to different forms of intervention programmes in order to liberate these groups from their primordial cultures. But, and this is important to point out, the homogenisation of immigrants also serves to hierarchise the differences constructed in relation to the norm in terms of ability and competence. Some national ‘groups’ are perceived implicitly as coming from nondemocratic societies, compared to western democratic societies. However, there is a conflation between cultural otherness of the ‘other’ and democratic skills, which is difficult to differentiate. A number of researchers have pointed out that this sorting and classification has consequences for the position of immigrants in the labour market (Neergaard, 2002; Osman, 2006), and, as evident from the above, the practice of popular education is no different. That is, the exclusion and the pathologisation of the ‘other’ go hand in hand and are used to legitimise the introduction of various control regimes targeting those typified as different and problematic. However, the objective of these control regimes is internalisation and changes in attitudes, behaviour and action on the part of those identified as deviant in relation to the norm.

The cultural deficit paradigm is, according to my observations as well

as previous research (Osman, 2006), the dominant understanding of how traditional Swedish institutionalised study associations conceptualise the exclusion of immigrants (see Eriksson and Osman, 2003). This understanding of the exclusion of immigrants informs their relations with immigrant associations as a group and the activities organised by these associations under the sponsorship or watchful eyes of the traditional Swedish associations. This knowledge is used to coopt immigrant associations within the institutions of popular education, marginalise their work and, more importantly, serve as a recruiting ground for the activities of the traditional associations. They, in other words, become experts in this field, and with this recognition comes the ability to get project funding for the integration of immigrants.

## **Summary and discussion**

In the above description it is apparent how, in responding to the challenges of the social exclusion of immigrants, popular education coopts its core ideas and adapts these ideas to legitimise its practice in the process of facilitating the integration of immigrants. This language, according to Foucault, constitutes how the institution understands itself, defines its social function and legitimates the institution in relation to other institutions. Foucault (1993) points out that institutional practice ‘binds individuals to certain enunciation’ by which he means structures the practice of the institution. This enunciation and language is used to conceptualise the role of the institution in facilitating the inclusion of immigrants. These are: dialogue, social justice, democratic values, civic education, etc. However, in any field there are competing languages, and in this context Usher notes:

*If we think for a moment of our own practices as educators, we now have many ways in enunciating that practice that could not have been foreseen or spoken of twenty years ago. We are in the panopticon – incorporated surveyed, assessed, evaluated and bottom lined (Usher et al., 1997, p. 57).*

If language legitimises institutional practice, then a change of practice is often signalled by a change in the language of the practice. Popular education has used, and still uses, the same language and practice in facilitating the inclusion of immigrants. It is, however, important to stress

that although the language has not changed, the meaning of the language has shifted. The shift in meaning is implicit in the view that the role of popular education institutions is to ‘organise immigrants’. This, however, does not mean organising and mobilising ethnic minority groups as a collective to challenge the power structures and demand social justice but to organise them and internalise in the group a democratic ethos and incorporate them into existing democratic structures.

This ambition is informed by, or based on, the understanding that the exclusion of immigrants is a consequence of their cultural ‘otherness’. It is this ‘otherness’ in relation to the norm that is identified as the problem that needs to be addressed first. For instance, the exclusion of immigrant associations and individuals from the decision-making process in study associations is legitimised by the notion that some immigrants lack schooling in democratic traditions and that this needs to be corrected before they are included in the existing democratic structures. In addition, the notion of cultural dialogue is based, as noted earlier, on the notion that the cultural ‘otherness’ of immigrants is a problem. Thus, the goal of dialogue in this context is to bridge the cultural gap, rather than use it as a meeting place of cultures. In practice, this means impressing upon ethnic minority immigrants the archaic nature of their culture and consequently the need to change their attitudes and behaviour and to assimilate. This dialogue would, at best, reduce the prejudice of mainstream society and thus improve the chances and opportunities for immigrant communities in Swedish society.

Thus, the learning acquired and privileged in the encounter between immigrants and popular education institutions is to inculcate in the other (the newcomers) the abilities, skills and values that are required to include them in the existing sociopolitical order (Biesta, 2011). In other words, the practice of popular education, one would argue, is in line with Biesta’s conceptualisation of citizenship: ‘primarily as a *social* identity, having to do with one’s place and role in the life of society’ (*ibid.*, p. 1). This conceptualisation is explicit in the encounter or perceives plurality as a problem and privileges social cohesion, and immigrants’ ability, otherness, etc., is measured in relation to a norm – the norm of the dominant society – and inclusion is based on perception of dispositional acculturisation to the norms of the dominant society.

However, this relationship with migrant associations serves to give the impression that study associations are in step with, or appear to respond

to, the needs of ethnic minority groups/individuals. However, one can also interpret this as an exercise in social control that ultimately entices the ethnic minority groups to fall into line, accept their exploitation and become complicit in their own exploitation, subordination and acceptance of a caricatural image of immigrants. In addition, this exercise of control aims to mobilise these communities and individuals and to coopt them into democratic institutional structures as individual subjects, not as members of an ethnic group. This is problematic, from a democratic perspective, according to Biesta (2011), particularly in relation to citizenship. That is, if we perceive citizenship in terms of the social then emphasis is put on social cohesion and difference is perceived as a threat to the social order of the society. The focus becomes inculcating what is imagined as the common values, national identity, etc., evident in the discourse of diversity. While the political understanding revolves around the notion of plurality and difference, hence, ‘the very *raison d’être* of democratic process’, as Biesta argues, it has to be protected and cultivated (*ibid.*, p. 2). He stresses: ‘as long as we see citizenship as a positive, identifiable identity, we can indeed see the learning involved as a process of the acquisition of the knowledge, skills and dispositions that are needed to bring newcomers into the existing sociopolitical order’ (*ibid.*, p. 5).

Thus, one can understand the practice of popular education in cooperating with immigrant associations to shape, sculpt, mobilise and influence the choices, desires, aspirations, needs, wishes and lifestyles of individuals and groups with specific goals. This normalisation project involves a process of sorting, classifying and creating exclusionary boundaries in relation to the dominant society, and including them in the existing political order. This process of normalisation imposes homogeneity. But it also individualises, by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by adapting them to one another. In addition, I perceive and interpret this role as an expression or perception that the work of popular education is to liberate immigrants from their primordial and backward cultures which are incompatible with a modern, democratic and liberal Swedish society and then to include them in the existing democratic structure.

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## CHAPTER NINE

# **Practising democracy as an agonistic dialogue: A radical political dimension of popular education**

*Berit Larsson*

The reflections presented in this chapter are based on my work and experience as a teacher in Sweden's only folk high school for adult women and transgender persons, the Women's Folk High School (*Kvinnofolkhögskolan*) in Gothenburg. In Sweden today there are 150 folk high schools, the first of which started in 1868. The Women's Folk High School is the 127th.

The establishment of the Women's Folk High School, which has an explicit feminist orientation, was the result of women's activism, and the school started in 1985. As a strategy to improve equality, the Swedish government has, since the 1980s, through 'affirmative action', supported the creation of some public spheres for women, of which the Women's Folk High School is an example.

Over 10,000 women with diverse backgrounds and experiences have been involved in a variety of long or short courses during the school's 25 years of existence. The atmosphere is heavily influenced by women's mutual diversities and complexities. Because of this, both students and teachers are forced to confront and deal with a variety of prejudices such as sexism, racism, heteronormativity, ableism, ageism, islamophobia and transphobia.

It is important to note that students at the school do not need to

identify themselves with feminism or as feminists. Different kinds of women and transgender persons come together from all ages, class boundaries, religions, skin colours, sexual preferences, ethnicities, functional capacities, sex-radicalisms and gender conservatisms (a never ending list). The school can thus be described as a shared room, which is **not** similar to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (Woolf, 1989), but rather as a concrete example of a *shared and divided* transnational or postnational practice, where different hegemonic value systems can be challenged.

What makes such a room as Kvinofolkhögskolan into a *public sphere* are its inconsistencies and paradoxes. Were it to be privatised, standardised or totalised the possibilities for action would be restricted or prevented. Questions which this then raises are:

*How is it possible in such a public sphere to manage the various interests, desires/demands that conflict with each other and how can you learn to work with, rather than try to master the differences (between individuals and between groups) and their associated complexity?* (Larsson, 2010, pp. 18–19)

This means that the students and teachers bring with them different beliefs, lifestyles and basic values, which constantly confront each other.

I will here give an example from my long experience working as a teacher in gender science and philosophy. A discussion on human rights started among the students. They use the expression human rights but I notice that they use entirely different meanings of the concept of 'rights', I then ask the students what they relate 'rights' to. I myself give even more examples. In this way we explore the fact that, although we use the same word, we have different ways of interpreting the concept of 'rights', depending on different contextual perspectives and experiences. Some of the students who lack rights as citizens, known as 'people without papers', do not even have the right to have rights. How then to relate rights to justice, and how to understand rights when some do not even have the right to have rights?

In a situation like this, the students have the possibility to be aware of different perspectives and even make changes in their way of interpreting their own understanding and to question the assumptions which they take for granted. Because of the varying perspectives, students can catch sight of what is taken for granted, which in turn can disturb their

spontaneous everyday consciousness. As a teacher I must first see that my way of interpreting what appears is only *one* way. On a personal level this is a process of consciousness that cannot be left out, especially as a woman, and thereby subject to and part of a misogyny that has gone on for thousands of years.

In a wider perspective, I would say that the significance of education in our time raises questions about identity and difference, about social and ecological justice and about meaningful and peaceful human coexistence. This really highlights questions about democracy and education, the essential topic of this text.

### **'A shared room': diversities and differences among women**

Because women do not constitute a homogenous and coherent group, but are positioned differently according to the discourses describing them, they cannot be consistently categorised as a group.

In this chapter I will maintain that what characterises the human condition is a constitutive vulnerability and a lack of fixed identity, which are also, in my opinion, the actual preconditions for politics. This means that humans are both preconditions for, and obstacles to, the identities of each other.

Women are not only different from each other, but their individual identities are also divided into multiple and sometimes conflicting identifications. In practice this means that women come to this folk high school with complex and contradictory historical and cultural realities. This results in conflicts of interpretations and disputes in many areas. What for one group of women acts as a release can for another group be oppressive. In 'A room of one's own', described here as women's 'shared room', there is then an ineradicable conflict and this is the challenge a democratic politic faces. Unless one wishes to destroy politics, one must also challenge particularities, as these present the basic precondition of democratic pluralistic politics, a practice where *antagonisms* cannot be eliminated, but may well be transformed into *agonism* (Mouffe, 2005, pp. 8–19).

The Women's Folk High School, with its feminist approach, became an arena that, among other things, created the conditions to investigate how different women's identities, civic identities and various feminist strategies are constructed and challenged in various discourses. It is

against this background that I have continually, over several years, found it essential to reflect on how feminism's 'subject' is constituted, and more specifically how subjectification in this context can be understood. What are the possibilities for critical understanding and what is its relationship to women's different experiences?

To be more precise, my purpose in this text is not to discuss specific pedagogical methods, but to reflect on some complexities we have to deal with in a feminist discourse, of which the Women's Folk High School is an example. In doing this I will use and compare some feminist and philosophical theories.

### ***Diversities and differences among feminisms***

If you look back at the feminist debate taking place in the western world (in a European and North American context) during the last thirty years, it is clear that it has changed from assumptions about a consensus among women to a recognition of the differences and diversities among them. Today there is a fairly broad consensus among feminist theorists that there has been a paradigm shift within western feminist theory which, inspired by worldwide decolonisation movements, has changed its view of power, struggle and social change (Mohanty, 2003; Moraga and Anzaldua, 2001; Spivak, 1999). Feminism has simply changed the parameters of what we as women have in common, but it is important to note that wherever there is a community there are also those who are excluded.

Differences among women cannot be subordinated to a universal feminist agenda, although there have been tendencies to universalise women's experiences. In this sense, feminist theory is not one coherent theory, but many theories, where parameters such as ethnicity, religion, gender, class, colour, sexual orientation, age and functional capacity have been used to understand differences and similarities between women both as a group and as individuals. These ideas have been widely spread, not least by Judith Butler's book *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 1990), where the author conveys her fear that feminist theory, despite its emancipatory and political ambitions, could itself become an oppressive theory.

Differences between women are not only about identity difference or how identity is shaped. The difference is rather a problem for identity, as difference is what identity is constantly seeking to eradicate, fix or keep in place. Postcolonial feminists and queer theorists, in particular, highlight this problem. And since feminism is always divided, these differences will be the starting point in a democratic practice (and

theory), but also a problem for feminism. If we therefore take not only identity but difference seriously, we have to espouse the inevitable conflicts and the deeply rooted resistance that lie in the political and moral project to organise subjects, institutions and the world.

Of course, in a heterogeneous practice you can continue without addressing differences and conflicts, and perhaps try to ignore or avoid these difficulties. But in a feminist heterogeneous discourse this is precisely what we do use and deal with. It means that we, as women, both have to confront and live with differences among each other, as well as differences and inconsistencies within ourselves. This is also partly what the political theorist Chantal Mouffe writes about in her book *On The Political* (Mouffe, 2005).

At the Women's Folk High School, as a heterogeneous practice, there is a unique opportunity not only to highlight these differences between women, but also the differences and inconsistencies contained within the individual. The work in such a practice is not only a didactic but also a social and political challenge, which requires everyone to have an ability to understand that someone else's 'way of seeing' is only one 'way of seeing'. However, this is not a simple cognitive process, but rather a risky and uncertain relationship, because the individuals' position as subjects is challenged and in danger of destabilisation.

If we, accordingly, concretise the philosopher Hannah Arendt's expression 'go visiting' (Arendt, 1978, p. 257), into this very practice, we expose ourselves to and confront each other's way of seeing. Then the familiar and the habitual are exceeded, as there are no universal patterns of interpretation that can be applied to our lives. As a teacher or a student you are reminded of this every day, which perhaps also has the most important impact on our work.

## A radical political dimension of popular education

In my opinion, what must be trained and developed in practices of education, especially at the Women's Folk High School, is the *ability* that makes one understand that phenomena appear in different ways for different people at different times. We have to train the *ability* itself. Therefore, an essential purpose is the students', as well as the teacher's, *awareness* of the 'other'. At the same time as the situation requires what the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas calls our 'responsibility for the other' (Levinas, 1979, p. 203), we are exposed to and challenged by

the unfamiliar. This also allows for an approach that exceeds the limits, governed by habits and traditions. The pedagogue Sharon Todd, inspired by Levinas, speaks in this context of *respect* for the other. She claims that this is not the same as treating the other as ‘a rational entity like myself, but is about responding to her individuality in a way that guarantees her right to be different, dissimilar’ (Todd, 2010, p. 186).

However, this does not only affect educational philosophical questions of equality and democracy. The practical teaching and education also contain rather complex didactic challenges such as: How can anybody have the courage to ‘go visiting’ in someone else’s thinking when what is different, unfamiliar or unknown is perceived as threatening? How shall I dare to expose myself to threats to my habitual thinking, when what I know gives my life stability and control?

Moreover, if stability in life is already fragile and self-esteem is very low, how is it possible to admit (not misrecognise) diversity and difference? What needs to be done to understand others’ interpretations, what is required to give up the claim that ‘one’ way of seeing, namely one’s own way of seeing, is the only real way?

The challenge here, as I see it, is to learn to live with the problem of plurality, and simply invite insecurity. Of course this is easily said, but how do we deal with it in practice?

It is in this context that I want to introduce a radical concept of *bildung* (here described as *radical popular education*), which has a political dimension. Since the essence of this radical concept is both equality and individuals’ and groups’ differences, it is impossible to expect consensus. The political dimension is more about creating difference and antagonism. The question is whether, and if so how, within such a practice one can transform a friend–enemy relationship to a relationship between adversaries (Mouffe, 2005, p. 19).

In relation to this I use the distinction the post-Marxist Chantal Mouffe makes between *the political* and *politics*. By the political Mouffe refers to: ‘the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations’ (Mouffe, 2000, p. 101). According to Mouffe, antagonism is the ontological basis of *the political*, which is characterised by antagonism or conflict between enemies. She underlines that antagonism is constitutive of human societies. By *politics* she refers to:

. . . the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conditions

*that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimensions of 'the political'* (Mouffe, 2000, p. 101).

On the other hand, agonism denotes conflicts between 'legitimate enemies'. The relationship of friend–enemy, has in other words, according to Mouffe, been transformed into a struggle between adversaries. The concepts borrowed from Mouffe that have become useful tools when talking about radical popular education are 'pluralistic agonism' and 'conflictual consensus' (Mouffe, 2005, p. 52). I will underline that at the Women's Folk High School it is not desirable and not even possible to avoid the struggle between adversaries. Taking this into account, the students sometimes see each other, using Mouffe's expression, as 'friendly enemies'.

### **Radical popular education as both *remembering* and a *transgression***

The curriculum at the school is based on the backgrounds and the experiences of the students. In other texts I have also argued that radical popular education is both a work of *remembering* and of *transgression* [transcendence] (Larsson, 1990, pp. 35–40).

In this context we should look upon work of remembering (re-member, i.e. merge together, recognition) to be understood as based in the individual's memories and belongings, constructed by personal experience and history, the same as identification. But unlike the work of remembering that takes place in private and individual psychological/therapeutic work, here it is used in a teaching context in a more general way.

By *going visiting* into another person's way of seeing, the attention and the awareness are focused on the other. This means of recognising differences challenges the boundaries of one's own preconceptions and assumptions and the subject is destabilised. The individual can, by developing this capacity to visit, possibly become more aware of others' reality, but also gain an increased understanding of her own vulnerability.

When thinking of the political dimension of popular education, I have also found an interesting and useful distinction made by the philosopher Jacques Rancière. He distinguishes between *identification* and *subjectification* (Rancière, 2003, pp. 224–226). According to him, identification deals with taking on an existing identity, to be identifiable and

visible within an already existing order, while subjectification is about a way of being that has no part in the existing system, mainly to be understood as a form of *disidentification* (Rancière, 1995, p. 36). I think that Rancière's distinction can be compared to my definition of radical popular education as both a work of remembering and a transgression; or, using Rancière's own expression, both as identification and subjectification (Rancière, 1995, p. 36).

The practice which I describe is therefore about how conflicts, in the sense of antagonisms, are generated in a heterogeneous group of women by negotiating, deconstructing and reconstructing diversities between them. Although the conflicts that arise involve didactic difficulties for all parties concerned, I maintain that these conflicts allow individual subjectification. They can also be a source for alliances between different women, without subordinating diversities in a binary logic of inequality.

This means that the idea of equality is not synonymous with consensus, because equality, in the sense of being both different and equal, is the heart of what I mean by democratic dialogues. That is why conflicts and antagonisms will inevitably appear (Rancière, 2003, pp. 29–30). My opinion is that the democratic process is characterised by these exchanges and confrontations. Democracy can here be seen as a *performative activity*. Therefore, in such a radical practice we have to confront antagonisms rather than sweep them under the carpet. But, as I said earlier, this means inviting insecurity and vulnerability.

I also agree with Rancière's view that equality is a claim for recognition of difference, and therefore equality can never be achieved without conflict and controversy. Furthermore, he argues that a repoliticisation of conflicts requires an acceptance of turbulence and unpredictability at our meetings, especially if they are to have any democratic signification (Rancière, 2003, p. 118). That is also what we have experienced at the Women's Folk High School, and that is also why I say that this shared room is neither calm nor safe.

Democracy is, therefore, not a regime or a social way of life but 'a claim for equality', a situation where a group previously excluded takes a step forward and claims its place in the sun (Rancière, 1999, p. 101). It is at the same time the creation of a group, as a group with a distinct identity, which did not exist before.

It is useful to speak of differences of opinion between 'legitimate enemies' or the pluralistic agonism that, according to Mouffe, characterises politics (Mouffe, 2005, pp. 8–34). The philosopher Hannah Arendt makes

a similar point when she singles out the political sphere from a social and private one. For Arendt, the political sphere is what occurs between individuals when they participate in a free and unbiased dialogue, which she calls ‘to act in concert’ (Arendt, 1982, p. 93). By meeting and listening to another person’s story, through a confrontation and an exchange with another person’s way of thinking, one can be brought to innovate and transform one’s subjectivity. Politics then becomes a process through which new ways of doing and being come into existence, a process within and through which political subjects are constructed (Arendt, 1958, pp. 178–181). According to Arendt, this is the actualisation of the human condition of *nativity*, which she describes as follows:

*The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable. And this again is possible only because each man is unique, so that with each birth something uniquely new comes into the world. With respect to this somebody who is unique it can be truly said that nobody was there before* (Arendt, 1958, p. 178).

I think that this actualisation of the human condition of natality is very compatible with the process of radical popular education, which, in my interpretation, can also be compared to the process of subjectification that Rancière argues for.

### ***Education of interruption***

The issue raised among those of us who are active in various practices of popular education is whether we are too busy to reproduce a socially institutionalised system with its solid knowledge structures. Is the educational process too focused on recognition, confirmation and identification? Or is there also room for what Sharon Todd terms ‘a pedagogy that is open for the possibility of interruption (breaks) from the “normal” regime’. Todd talks about *an imperfect education* (Todd, 2009).

Gert Biesta makes a similar argument when talking about a *pedagogy of interruption* and believes that ‘the fundamental weakness of education is the question of subjectification’. But at the same time he says the following:

*This ontological weakness in the education is at the same time its existential strength. Because it is only when we give up the thought*

*that human subjectivity in some way can be produced by education,  
that a room can be opened for uniqueness to break into the world.  
This is what is at stake in the pedagogy of interruption (Biesta,  
2011, p. 95 [my translation]).*

What Biesta means by questions concerning ‘the pedagogy of interruption’ is precisely what arises when diversities among individuals are confronted with notions of equality. Exactly such an interruption, where we open up possibilities for the uniqueness of the students to break into the world, can become possible in the practices of radical popular education, such as the Women’s Folk High School. That is also what I have investigated in my book, *Ett delat rum* (Larsson, 2010).

Another issue that should be highlighted in this context is what happens to the democratic practice when part of a social and political movement, like the women’s movement, which in Sweden has in part worked on the political margins, becomes institutionalised. What happens when parts of such a movement are converted into an educational institution? What is the relationship between the individual and the institution, what happens between different institutions and what takes place within the individual who becomes completely or partially, if not identified with at least involved in the institution?

My experience of this institutionalisation is that the meaning of the feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’ might change to something more like ‘the private is social’. If such a shift occurs, from the political to the social, the individual’s need for education and the teacher’s willingness to explain and popularise scientific knowledge comes more into focus than the political. The social institution offers new knowledge, educational opportunities, careers and economy, which fit private needs and wishes. The personal and the political are thus likely to be replaced by individualism and institution, and there is a clear risk of a depoliticisation of both the movement and the individuals. Emancipation is no longer the individual’s equality basis, but is instead turned into a social goal to strive for (Rancière, 1995, p. 35). And the social is always constituted through power.

This does not mean that the socialisation concept of civic learning is unimportant and insignificant, quite the contrary. But what I want to safeguard here is the process of subjectification, the political democratic dimension of popular education. This requires a place, a public sphere for meetings between human differences, where individuals are confronted

with different values and power structures, and where we try to identify what is ‘wrong’ ‘instead of silencing the difficult voices by opening up new contexts for both consensus and continuous disagreement’ (Todd, 2010, p. 190).

The challenge here is to relate to others in a way that signifies what Todd calls ‘a practice of justice’ (Todd, 2010, p. 38). According to her, this is to see the problematic aspects of concrete interactions between people in specific temporal and spatial contexts. Transferred to the practice that I am talking about, it means that those involved cannot easily categorise each others’ differences but must approach these differences intersectionally. An important role for the teacher in these relationships is to try to deal with the present moment without depriving people of the opportunity to imagine a different future. This is also why I think that *imperfect education* or *interruption of pedagogy*, from time to time, can be very useful in our practice.

### ***A shared room***

I would like to claim that one condition for an institution like the Women’s Folk High School to function as a public sphere is that it has to become possible to maintain a polycultural setting and to be internally managed to make room for a polyphony of voices. It is absolutely essential for these kinds of dialogues that from the start participants are seen as equals (equality as a human condition), i.e. equal and free to talk as equals. In other words, the dialogues do not have emancipation as a goal but as a starting point. In such a dialogue, the antagonisms and different interests will be elucidated and diversities will be more challenging in the attempts of these voices to renegotiate a hegemonic order (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). It is also in situations like these where *interruption of pedagogy* is most applicable.

When women constitute a group (or as in this case an institution) it is not unusual for them to be questioned and criticised. This makes it difficult to maintain the very differences between women, which were essential for keeping in a public sphere as opposed to a private one. The feminist Bernice Johnson Reagon emphasises, and draws attention to, the possibility that separate women’s institutions reinforce normative definitions of ‘woman’ and that such ‘rooms of one’s own’ run the risk of becoming locked, ‘barred rooms’ (Reagon, 1983, p. 349).

Longing for home, the need for security, makes people unprepared to survive in a world of strangers. They are simply unprepared for

conflicts. Instead of challenging one's own position, there is a risk of creating an illusion of community, an isolation that does not challenge the differences but rather reinforces them. In this sense, I agree with Johnson Reagan who does not want to offer any home-like structure in women's rooms, and she almost scolds the women who resort to feminist politics in order to find a home-like protection.

My observations and interpretations are similar, namely that some women try to transform the public sphere into a private 'home'. They want to create an intimate sphere with a strong desire for mutual identification, empathic participation and care of each other, best termed as 'mothering' or 'maternalism'. In these situations there is a strong wish for everyone to agree, a quest for consensus (which inevitably is always on the conditions determined by a dominant group) and absolutely no place for confrontations. Anything that threatens an idealised identification is banned. This means that the processes of change, by Rancière called disidentification, how we generate new political subjectivities by transgression or subjectification, are completely blocked (Rancière, 1995, p. 36).

To counteract tendencies in this way can lead to a depoliticisation of the room; it is of utmost importance not to homogenise women's experiences. Bonnie Honig mentions a similar idea. She believes that when engaging in the 'political project', you give up a place called 'home'. You give up a place free from power, conflicts and struggle, a place – an identity, a life form – which is unmarked by differences (Honig, 2001, p. 118).

Thus, I want to say that it is possible to find ways to talk about women in a way that neither attacks our differences, nor represents us as inconsolably different. The political process of popular education that I am trying to outline is simply to tolerate difference without disparaging similarity. This, however, faces us with the question: is solidarity between women across differences and borders possible? Given that women are socially and sometimes also nationally divided, to what extent is a feminist solidarity possible?

Many theorists, among others Nira Yuval-Davis and bell hooks, have tried to find practical solutions to this issue. Their proposal captures exactly the dilemma that we face in the room of the feminist practice of the Women's Folk High School, where not least the question of representation becomes acute. This also brings us back to my initial questions: How is it possible, in such a public sphere, to manage the

various interests, desires and demands that conflict with each other, and how can you learn to work with, rather than try to master the differences (between individuals and between groups) and their associated complexity? One suggestion of how to deal with this in practice is through *transversal politics* (Yuval-Davies, 1998) or the work of remembering and transgression (Larsson, 1990).

### ***Transversal politics***

In an attempt to get around the issue of representation Yuval-Davis suggests that the women (the feminists), instead of seeing themselves as representatives, should see themselves as advocates of their constituencies, and here it is important:

*... that they should be conscious of the multiplexity of their specific positionings, both in relation to other women in their societies, as well as in relation to the other participants in the specific encounter*  
(Yuval-Davis, 1998, p. 120).

As women, we are both the same and different. Therefore, she believes that alliances of power and social change are dependent on how well we have defined ourselves through a pattern that includes both our particularities and our uniqueness (both subjectification and identification). It is here that she, with *transversal politics*, tries to answer how and with whom we must cooperate if/when differences between women are recognised and given a voice. This is also why I find her argument extremely important in the context of the Women's Folk High School, as a heterogeneous practice. Because in practice the universalism based on homogeneity will always become excluding.

Yuval-Davis wants to replace such homogeneity with transversalism that assumes different positions, thus providing polyphony, what she calls a genuine dialogue. bell hooks is partly along the same lines when she looks upon universalism as both a false and corrupt basis (hooks, 1994, pp. 35–44). But, while Yuval-Davis talks about a 'transversal dialogue', hooks argues for a dialogue that is 'transgressive' (hooks, 1994, pp. 11–12). I see both of these as useful tools in the practice of a radical popular education and also quite similar to my expressions *remembering* and *transgression*. A way of dealing with transversalism and transgressiveness is what Yuval-Davies suggests as the method of *rooting and shifting* (Yuval-Davis, 1998, p. 130).

The idea is that each participant in the dialogue brings her own rooting in her own group affiliation and identity (to be rooted, to be situated), in this text mentioned as identification. At the same time she tries to ‘change’ by putting herself into a situation of exchange with a woman who has a different group affiliation and identity. This kind of dialogue is called transversalism. In a similar way I try to describe this process in a radical practice of popular education by using the work of remembering and transgression, which also has its similarities with the concepts of identification and subjectification used by Rancière. But in this kind of radicalisation the political part is just transgression and subjectification.

When developing the transversal perspective, Yuval-Davis emphasises the following aspects as particularly important:

*Firstly, the process of changing must not involve self-decentring, that is loosing one’s own rooting and set of values. . . . It is vital in any form of coalition and solidarity politics to keep one’s own perspective on things while empathizing and respecting others* (Yuval-Davis, 1998, p. 130).

I compare this to the work of remembering or identification. It is, in other words, important firstly to maintain one’s own position even if it will be exposed to others’ perspectives.

Secondly, Yuval-Davis stresses that within heterogeneous pluralistic communities there is a risk of what she calls ‘uncritical solidarity’ (Yuval-Davis, 1998, pp. 130–131). She believes that women often become victims of an approach that allows the so-called representatives and leaders of the ‘community’ to determine what applies to them. This can be compared to what bell hooks writes about in her essay ‘Sisterhood: political solidarity between women’ (hooks, 1997, pp. 485–500).

Thirdly, she emphasises that a transversal politics is not always possible (Yuval-Davis, 1998, p. 131). But if we use Mouffe’s definition on *politics*, based on agonism which means:

*. . . a we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents. They are ‘adversaries’ not enemies* (Mouffe, 2005, p. 20).

In my opinion, we could then say that transversal politics is always possible. In this sense I will identify a radical practice of popular education as transversal politics. But if transversal politics is based on what Mouffe means by *the political*, where antagonism is a ‘we/they relationship in which the two sides are enemies who do not share a common ground’ (Mouffe, 2005, p. 20), transversal politics is not possible.

The crucial question as I see it is then to transform antagonism into agonism. It is important here to highlight the following clarification Mouffe draws attention to:

*The fundamental question for democracy theory is to envisage how the antagonistic dimension – which is constitutive of the political – can be given a form of expression that will not destroy the political association. I suggest that it required distinguishing between the categories of ‘antagonism’ (relations between enemies) and ‘agonism’ (relations between adversaries) and envisaging a sort of ‘conflictual consensus’ providing a common symbolic space among opponents who are considered as ‘legitimate enemies’. Contrary to the dialogic approach, the democratic debate is conceived as a real confrontation. Adversaries do fight – even fiercely – but according to a shared set of rules, and their positions, despite being ultimately irreconcilable, are accepted as legitimate perspectives (Mouffe, 2005, p. 52).*

When people do not look upon the other as equal, do not see equality as a significant human condition and do not want to talk at all to the other, then it is of course impossible to transform antagonism into agonism. This can happen between people who do not share the ‘ethico-political’ values of liberty and equality for all, even if there always will be disagreement concerning the meaning of and the way liberty and equality should be implemented. But when people acknowledge each other as ‘legitimate enemies’ they share a common symbolic space.

What can also hinder the creation of an agonistic public sphere is if politics is played out in the register of morality, as Mouffe says:

*... when opponents are defined not in political but in moral terms, they cannot be envisaged as ‘adversary’ but only as ‘enemy’. With the ‘evil them’ no agonistic debate is possible, they must be eradicated (Mouffe, 2005, p. 76).*

The political dialogue, therefore, involves conflicts of interest, where heterogeneous processes meet, and in making claims for equality, there is a *conflictual consensus*.

In this context it is also important to mention that Yuval-Davis separates social identities and social values. She means to say that a shared value system, such as the idea of freedom and equality, can exist across different positions and identities. In order not to fall into the deplorable ‘identity politics’ of feminism of a nationalist or racist nature, according to Yuval-Davis, solidarity must therefore be based on transversal principles.

The method of rooting and shifting can, according to my analysis, function as a concrete example of how one can learn to work with, rather than try to master, the differences and diversities (between individuals and between groups) and their associated complexity.

In order to maintain a democratic approach in the ‘shared room’, a form of dialogue that allows participants to recognise specific positioning is therefore needed, but also an acceptance that individuals and groups can put forward claims of knowledge without ‘all rights reserved’. Yuval-Davis argues that each such situated position offers an ‘incomplete knowledge’, which means that she, in her argument, effectively brings together politics and epistemology.

In practice that means not to look on theory as separate from politics and even more not to separate theory from practice. Instead Yuval-Davis talks about an ‘unfinished dialogue’. Finally, this brings me to mention something about the discussion of the relationship between theory and practice that can occur in a feminist radical transgressive teaching.

## **Transgressive teaching**

Being able to use the term feminism does not mean that you are able or even wish to put feminism into practice. At the same time, it may also be, as bell hooks says, that you can live and act in a feminist way without using the word feminism (hooks, 1994, p. 61).

In my opinion there is an obvious danger that the ‘shared room’ feminist theory, institutionalised in the academy, privileges the written feminist thinking at the expense of the oral narration. If such an academic feminist speech is privileged in the dialogue, the consequence can be anti-intellectualism among those who reject such a hegemonic feminist discourse. This relates to bell hooks, who also believes that it

may create a false dichotomy between theory and practice in feminist groups because, as she writes:

*... many women have responded to hegemonic feminist theory that does not speak clearly to us by trashing theory, and, as a consequence, further promoting the false dichotomy between theory and practice. Hence, they collude with those whom they would oppose. By internalizing the false assumption that theory is not a social practice, they promote the formation within feminist circles of potentially oppressive hierarchy where all concrete action is viewed as more important than any theory written or spoken (hooks, 1994, pp. 65–66).*

If such a false dichotomy is maintained it inhibits the community in the symbolic sphere. There is no interest in learning to work with differences, but only an interest in mastering them. According to Chantal Mouffe, this makes a conflictual consensus impossible and what remains is only real antagonism between real enemies. In this situation there is consequently no interest in creating a public sphere.

A radical practice of popular education means that theory and practice presuppose each other, which is also what hooks refers to as ‘transgressive education’. The performative aspect of teaching is precisely the democratic process stated in the title of this paper and which, in my opinion, must be part of a radical educational concept. Democracy is then a mode of expression and, as Rancière says, ‘a claim for equality’ (Rancière, 2003, p. 101).

### **The Women’s Folk High School: a shared and divided transnational or postnational practice**

By using different philosophical ideas and arguments I have tried to reflect on my experiences from the Women’s Folk High School, as a shared and divided transnational or postnational practice.

Imagine a classroom where the young anarchic feminist is sitting beside the experienced professional middle-aged woman, who has never spared a thought for feminism, where women with a five-year schooling are working together with academics, and where veiled Muslim women are confronted with secular women who prefer baldness.

This is a condensed description of this shared and divided practice,

where women come together, regardless of age and across class boundaries, religion, colour, sexual orientation, ethnicity, ability, sex radicalism and gender conservatism (a never ending list). Of course this is not a peaceful place, but rather a place of constant confrontation between the most diverse ideas on morality, religion and politics. Through the students' different perspectives, through the various ways they identify themselves, and how they are joined in solidarity with various groups, and hold onto or distance themselves from their group affiliations, such a classroom is already 'politicised'.

Provided that the individual differences between people are encouraged, maintained and respected, such classrooms become a forum for listening beyond the home or the local group rooms. To recognise each other's differences can mean having to change perceptions of how to learn. Instead of being afraid of conflicts, ways must be found in which conflicts are used as catalysts for new thinking. By acting in concert new unprecedented processes start whose outcomes remain uncertain.

Accordingly, from these experiences of the Women's Folk High School, I conclude that to act in concert within an agonistic dialogue confirms that agonistic feminism can be reconciled with a politically radical concept of popular education. In my opinion, this can challenge the order of power and, through that, reshape social structures.

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## Part IV

# Beyond the Swedish context



## CHAPTER TEN

# Folk schools in the United States: A Scandinavian inspiration

*Sylvia S. Bagley and Val D. Rust*

### Introduction

Modern folk schools in the United States exist in a number of different forms and serve a variety of purposes.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the relatively unified and regulated systems of government-funded folk high schools in Scandinavia, U.S. folk schools are independently operated, highly varied, nonprofit organisations which range ‘from study circles and family camps, to centers preserving folk arts . . . and promoting social justice and citizen participation in the solution of major social, economic and environmental problems’ (Cedar Bend Folk School website).<sup>2</sup>

The definition of ‘folk high school’ remains elusive and has been debated for decades (Parke, 1977/2009). From its inception in Scandinavia, as a philosophical ideal borne by Nikolai Grundtvig, to its corporeal emergence in Scandinavia, to its transplantation to the United States and other countries, its unique character has gradually shifted and adapted to meet the needs of those who have sought to benefit from its core principles.

Its definition remains particularly elusive in the United States, where a number of independent folk schools exist, but without a unifying governing body. The most consistent attempt to organise folk schools in the United States was the creation, in 1976, of the grassroots Folk Education Association of America (FEAA; currently known as the

Institute for People's Education and Action, or IPEA), with the mission to 'identify, support, and facilitate community-based, learner-led education as a strategic tool for community organizing' (Institute for People's Education and Action website). In 2002, its activities largely came to a halt because of struggles 'with leadership and finances', though it maintains a presence on the web (Spicer, 2009, p. 23). Currently, each folk school in the United States survives on its own initiative, though informal networking among schools continues, and a new folk school seems to emerge nearly every year.

Our goal in this chapter is to shed some light on the current state of folk schools in the United States. We will share our findings from a study we conducted to determine which folk schools currently exist, what their primary aims are and in what ways (if any) they owe a debt to their Scandinavian counterparts. We offer a thematic analysis of the 20 folk schools that now exist in the United States, noting that, while they are widely disparate, they share some common goals and visions. We take a look at the role folk schools currently play in the American adult education sector, and note that they continue to serve a distinctive niche – though we also argue that they could benefit from renewed Scandinavian inspiration.

## **Early folk schools in the United States**

The first folk schools in the United States originated from two major sources: Scandinavian emigrants wishing to preserve their cultural traditions and Americans hoping to build upon the Scandinavian model 'in order to vitalize and bring about fundamental change among farmers, hill people, and the poor in America' (Bagley and Rust, 2009, p. 292).

From the founding of the first American folk high school in 1877 until the late 1930s, there were seven Scandinavian-American folk high schools in the United States: Elk Horn Folk High School in Iowa (which functioned until the early 1920s); Ashland Folk High School in Michigan (1882–1888); West Denmark Folk High School in Wisconsin (1884, for one term); Nysted Folk High School in Nebraska (1887–1934); Danebod Folk High School in Minnesota (founded in 1888, and still functioning today in a different capacity as Danebod Family Camp and Danebad Folk Meeting); Brorson Folk High School in North Dakota (1902–1916); and Atterdag College in California (1910–1931) (Bagley and Rust, 2009; Nielsen, 1993). These folk schools quickly

took on characteristics distinct from their counterparts in Scandinavia, however, and were ultimately short-lived, as Scandinavian emigrants assimilated into mainstream American society, and the need for folk schools was no longer seen as salient (Kulich, 1964; Larson, 1980; Parke, 1977/2009).

In his discussion of why and how these early folk schools faded from existence, Nielsen (1993, p. 40) notes that whereas Grundtvig's ideal was the 'moral, intellectual, and spiritual renewal of the Danish people through an examination of their own culture', the role of many of the American folk schools founded by Scandinavian immigrants 'was one of serving an immigrant population for a brief period'. He argues that the leaders of these early schools were unable to sufficiently address issues related to assimilation into American culture, and that the schools 'withered and disappeared' because 'the educational model of a curriculum without tests, grades, and diplomas did not fit well with the prevailing American model of higher education' (*ibid.*).

Indeed, there was a pragmatic dilemma for students at these early Scandinavian-American folk schools, given that earning a diploma would help them earn more money and get a better job; the inability to earn official credits for the work they were doing at the folk schools was thus seen by students as a major disincentive (Nielsen, 1983). Nielsen ultimately notes that while 'many who attended these institutions carried away from their experiences . . . a profound appreciation for the pedagogy', folk schools in America ultimately 'succumb[ed] to greater sociological forces' (1993, p. 41), including lack of sufficient funding and support by local Scandinavian populations (Nielsen, 1983, p. 179).

Meanwhile, a second, more sustainable type of early folk school emerged in the United States, founded by Americans who had visited schools in Scandinavia, and wanted to modify Grundtvig's ideals to fit the needs of local citizens. In 1925, Campbell Folk School was established in Brasstown, North Carolina with the aim of improving the quality of life for farmers and 'mountain people' while simultaneously helping them to 'preserve and share with the rest of the world' their everyday 'crafts, techniques, and tools' (Campbell Folk School website). In 1932, Highlander Folk School (now called Highlander Research and Education Center) was founded in Monteagle, Tennessee, as a way to 'provide education and support to poor and working people fighting economic injustice, poverty, prejudice, and environmental destruction' by helping 'grassroots leaders create the tools necessary for building

broad-based movements for change' (Highlander website). Both these folk schools are still in existence today, and serve as the ideological foundation for two primary themes we found when analysing current folk schools: an emphasis on preserving local crafts and traditions, and an emphasis on promoting social justice.

Meanwhile, in the first part of the twentieth century, Scandinavian folk schools were an inspiration for other forms of schooling in the United States. When founding Goddard College in Vermont in the late 1930s, for instance, Tim Pitkin looked to the folk school model, which he was attracted to, given that it offered 'a way of teaching and learning consistent with his own philosophy of education' (Bates, 1993/2009, p. 114). His college 'gave no grades, no examinations, no academic credits' instead relying 'on evaluation by the teachers and students to assess the learning which had taken place' (*ibid.*).

Bates (1993/2009) notes other short-lived, folk school-like opportunities in the United States as well – such as the Opportunity School operated by Berea College in Kentucky in the 1930s and 1940s. This month-long mid-winter programme was meant to 'provide some experience of residential education to adults and young people who could not avail themselves of the normal college program' (p. 170). Meanwhile, a host of 'settlement schools' were established in the Appalachian region which allowed isolated families living in the mountains to gain access to schooling. Bates argues that these may have been 'rather easily transformed into folk-colleges, if the principles and advantages offered were understood more widely, both by the people of the region and by the trustees of donor groups' (*ibid.*).

Despite the unique persistence of Campbell and Highlander however, by the mid-twentieth century folk schools in the United States remained peripheral to the broader landscape of educational institutions. Malcolm Knowles – widely acknowledged as the 'father of andragogy', or adult learning (Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, 1973/2005) – nonetheless argued that folk schools had 'contributed importantly to adult education in [the United States by] experimenting with new approaches to the education of adults and in meeting the needs of particular populations' (Knowles, 1962, p. 107).

Indeed, folk schools continued to be viewed by some as a provocative alternative to normative schooling practices in the United States and there was a renewed wave of interest in the 1960s and 1970s, as evidenced by the formation of the Folk Education Association of America in 1976.

A number of independent folk schools emerged and disappeared during these and the following decades. Kristensen (1983/2009), for instance, discusses founding and directing a folk school during the early 1970s known as Judson Life School, inspired by time she spent teaching at a folk high school in Denmark.

In the following analysis, we discuss those folk schools which have survived over the years, or have emerged in recent years, as yet another ‘new wave’ of interest in this unique form of adult education has emerged.

## **Current folk schools in the United States: a thematic analysis**

The following thematic analysis is based on 20 folk schools currently operating in America. We should note, however, that there may be additional folk schools we have not yet identified, given that there is no central database of folk schools in the United States for us to refer to.

All the schools analysed in our study are site-based folk schools, which are not explicitly connected to institutional higher education. Of these, one (Adirondack Folk School in upper New York) is just opening; another (Riverside Roots in Stillwater, Minnesota) is in nascent stages of development; and one (Pine Tree Folk School in Carmel, Maine) is currently ‘inactive’ as a school, but maintains an active presence as a resource on the internet, as well as having a comprehensive list of members for whom it continues to provide various educational opportunities.

Not included in the following analysis are two additional categories of folk schools. First, we do not include in our discussion degree-granting colleges and universities (such as Goddard College in Vermont) or accredited programmes affiliated with higher education (such as the Audubon Expedition Institute, a ‘travelling experiential school’) that are commonly acknowledged to have roots in the Scandinavian folk high school movement (Davis, 1996; O’Connell and Carl, 1996/2009). Second, there are a number of music schools in America which use ‘folk school’ in their name (such as the Folk School of St. Louis), but they do not come from the Scandinavian tradition, and thus we are not including them in our analysis.

## **Methodology**

Because there is no national database of folk schools in the United States, we began our search by visiting the IPEA webpage, then utilised the Google search engine to discover any additional ‘folk schools’. We visited the website of each of the schools we learned about (20 in all), and wrote to each one with the following list of questions:

1. How was your school founded? Please tell me a little bit about your school’s history. What ties, if any, does your school have to Scandinavian folk high schools? Were/are they an inspiration? If so, how?
2. Which population(s) does your school intend to serve?
3. How do the services you offer differ from those of other educational institutions (such as community colleges, etc.)?
4. What are the future goals for your school?
5. Are you in touch with other American folk schools? If so, in what way?
6. What do you believe is (or should be) the current role of folk schools in America?
7. Do you have any other thoughts you’d like to share about folk schools in America?

If a school’s website or other materials (i.e. brochures or books) provided sufficient information on any given topic, we simply invited the school’s representative to elaborate as desired. Our goal in asking question number five was to try to learn about other existing folk schools through a snowball process (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2009, p. 432). We were also interested in learning to what extent schools were in contact with each other, and/or gaining inspiration from one another.

We were fortunate to find a website for each of the 20 schools in our analysis. We sent a list of questions by email to each of these schools and received direct responses from six of them. In addition, we spoke on the telephone with representatives from 17 schools to obtain information that was not available on the website or in emailed survey responses.<sup>3</sup> For the most part, the information on the websites proved to be the most valuable in helping answer our questions.

After gathering our collective information from websites, emails and phone calls, we coded our data via an open interpretive approach

(Glaser and Struss, 1967/1999) to look for salient themes and patterns. In our analysis, we include information on each of the 20 folk schools in America which we know are currently in existence.

All but a few of the schools we discovered possess the name ‘folk school’ as part of their title. One key exception is Highlander Research and Education Center, which changed its name from Highlander Folk School in 1961 as it was restructured in response to external pressures applied by the state of Tennessee. Another exception is Camp Sister Spirit in Mississippi, which is a member of IPEA and fits our criteria for inclusion here in other ways (as will be discussed).

Finally, it should be noted that while we occasionally use the term ‘American’ or ‘Americans’ in our chapter (for ease of reading), we are focusing exclusively on schools within the United States rather than Canada or other American countries.

## Chronology

The folk schools discussed in this chapter range widely in terms of how long they have been in existence. A small number have roots in the early folk school movement, but most of them are very recent, having been founded in the last years of the twentieth century or during the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Danebod Folk School in Tyler, Minnesota, was one of the handful of original Scandinavian-American folk schools in the United States, but closed its doors before reopening in 1964 to offer a ‘folk school experience’ under the name of Danebod Folk Meeting and Danebod Family Camp (Danebod Lutheran Church, 1985). The two longest-running folk schools – Campbell Folk School (founded in 1925) and Highlander Research and Education Center (founded in 1932 as Highlander Folk School) – are also the most well-known and extensively researched; the body of research on Highlander is particularly impressive, given its pivotal role in the American civil rights and labour movements (c.f. Adams and Horton, 1975; Glen, 1988; Horton, 1971/1989). Clearing Folk School in Wisconsin was founded in 1935, and while it is not as well known as Campbell and Highlander, it nonetheless has an interesting history with a charismatic founder – the Danish-American landscape architect and conservationist, Jens Jensen – at its core (Grese, 1998).

**Table 10.1 Folk schools in the USA**

	<b>Name of school</b>	<b>Where located</b>	<b>Founding date</b>
1	Danebod Folk School (now Danebod Family Camp and Danebad Folk Meeting)	Tyler, Minnesota	1888
2	Campbell Folk School	Brasstown, North Carolina	1925
3	Highlander Research and Education Center (originally Highlander Folk School)	New Market, Tennessee	1932
4	Clearing Folk School	Elison Bay, Wisconsin	1935
5	Camp Sister Spirit Folk School	Ovett, Mississippi	1993
6	Pine Tree Folk School	Carmel, Maine	1993
7	North House Folk School	Grand Marais, Minnesota	1995
8	Cedar Bend Folk School	Osceola, Wisconsin	1996
9	Hopework Folk School	Minneapolis, Minnesota	1999
10	Ozark Folk School	Mountain View, Arkansas	2001
	Porcupine Mountains Folk School ('Porkies' or PMFS)	Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park, Michigan	2004
11	Pocosin Arts Folk School	Columbia, North Carolina	2004
12	Alabama Folk School (a.k.a. McDowell Folk School)	Camp McDowell, the Episcopal Church Camp and Conference Center for the Diocese of Alabama	2007
13	Ocrafolk School	Ocracoke Island, North Carolina	2007
14	Blue Stone Folk School	Noblesville, Indiana	2008
15	Adirondack Folk School	Adirondack Park, New York	2010
16	Riverside Roots Folk School	Stillwater, Minnesota	still in formation in 2010

17	Gale Woods Farm Folk School	Minnetrista, Minnesota	2003
18	Driftless Folk School	Viroqua, Wisconsin	2006
19	Martis Camp Folk School	Truckee, California	2008
20	Villages Folk School	Bonaparte, Iowa	2009

## **Thematic analysis**

In analysing current United States folk schools for themes and patterns, it is clear that they serve a wide variety of purposes and agendas, depending upon local needs and the unique visions of their founders. What links all folk schools in the United States, however, is a commitment to meeting a set of needs that are not addressed by other, more formal, avenues of adult schooling. Despite the diversity of goals served by current folk schools in the United States, they are all designed with the needs of local citizens in mind, and maintain an emphasis on noncompetitive, nongraded, lifelong education (Bagley and Rust, 2009, p. 293).

We have identified seven themes. One theme is the preservation and/or promotion of traditional arts and culture, often with a regional emphasis. Another theme is a connection with the local environment. A third theme is the promotion of a social justice agenda through active organisation and/or the hope of instilling a stronger sense of community through activities and enjoyable gatherings. A fourth theme is the cultivation of personal growth, creativity and renewal – or the cultivation of the ‘whole person’. A fifth theme is lifelong learning. A sixth theme is noncompetitive, nongraded learning. The final theme is the promotion of faith and worship. Many of these themes are aligned with the goals of Scandinavian folk schools, though they are carried out within a more modest timeframe and scope, given that American folk schools do not provide year long experiences for students in a boarding school setting.

### ***Preserving traditional arts and culture***

The dominant theme to emerge in our analysis is an emphasis on preserving traditional arts and cultures. This is the primary goal of Adirondack, Alabama, Blue Stone, Campbell, Driftless, Gale Woods Farm, North House, Ocrafolk, Ozark, Pocosin, Porkies, Riverside Roots and Villages.

A number of folk schools are devoted specifically to preserving the traditions of the particular region within which they reside. Adirondack

Folk School, for instance, notes that it is ‘the only school of its kind in the country dedicated to teaching the arts, crafts and culture of this unique Adirondack region’ of upper New York (Adirondack Folk School website). Similarly, Ozark Folk School in Arkansas claims it is ‘America’s only facility that works at preserving the Ozark heritage and presenting it in such an entertaining way’ (Ozark Folk School website). Other folk schools are not so explicit in their wording, but their offerings nonetheless make it clear that their emphasis is very much a regional one. Courses offered in Ocrafolk School’s weeklong island retreat, for instance, include ‘Ships in Bottles’, ‘Island Photography’, ‘Island Cooking’ and ‘Ocrafolk’s History and Seafaring Traditions’ (Ocrafolk School website).

While promoting regional traditions is a focus of many folk schools, a number of schools simply offer courses in more generic, ‘traditional arts and crafts’. Villages Folk School, for example, notes that it ‘specialises in providing learning experiences in traditional arts and skills’, offering classes that ‘include hands-on learning in arts and crafts, fine arts, nature study, and traditional time honored skills relating to the home’ (Villages Folk School website). Participants at Villages may ‘learn to paint, quilt, make pottery, forge iron, draw, sculpt, spin, weave, garden, and much more’ (*ibid.*). Similarly, workshop topics at Porcupine Mountains Folk School (commonly referred to as ‘Porkies’) range from learning how to sharpen tools, to beadmaking, to needle felting, to ‘carving whistles and flowers from freshly cut soft maple tree twigs’ (Porcupine Mountains Folk School website).

### ***Environment***

Another theme to emerge in our analysis was that of connecting citizens to the environment through the promotion of grassroots ecological preservation, by helping citizens to learn more about their local environment and/or by providing participants with an opportunity to connect with nature.

Cedar Bend Folk School is perhaps most devoted to environmental preservation, given its ongoing collaboration with regional grassroots ecological organisations and its hosting of specific courses on ‘Environmental Education’ and ‘Ecological Restoration’ (Cedar Bend Folk School website). Driftless Folk School, meanwhile, holds the specific environmental goal of ‘protect[ing], sustain[ing], and inspir[ing] small farming’ (Driftless Folk School website), while Riverside Roots Folk

School (currently in formation) notes that one of its core beliefs is that ‘awareness of the local environment leads to greater appreciation for environmentally responsible behavior’ (Riverside Roots Folk School website). Similarly, a goal of ‘Porkies’ Folk School, located within a state park, is for students to leave the school ‘as members of a larger community dedicated not only to the perpetuation of [traditional arts and crafts] but also to the American tradition of parks and wilderness areas’ (Porcupine Mountains Folk School website).

Other schools offer participants an opportunity to escape city life for a while. The founder of Clearing Folk School, for instance – Danish landscape architect Jens Jensen – envisioned his school ‘as a place where city people could renew their contact with the “soil” . . . in a setting of quiet forests, meadows and water’ (Clearing Folk School website). While most folk schools in the United States are rural, there is a handful – including Pocosin Arts Folk School (located in a gallery and workshop space in Columbia, North Carolina) – located in urban areas.

### ***Community***

An important goal of many folk schools in the United States is building and nurturing a sense of local community. Gale Woods Farm Folk School for instance ‘strives to enrich lives and establish connections’ among participants, encouraging not only lifelong learning but lifelong friendships (Gale Woods Farm Folk School website). Porkies aims for its participants to leave ‘as members of a larger community’, with one of its five guiding principles being to provide ‘opportunities for community building between students, instructors and volunteers’ (Porcupine Mountains Folk School website). Riverside Roots – a new folk school forming in Minnesota – has as one of its guiding principles the notion that ‘our community can change the world’; its founders believe that ‘communities need real-life interactions and experiences’ – such as those offered by folk schools – ‘to thrive’ (Riverside Roots Folk School website). To that end, Danebod in Minnesota has been offering two community-building opportunities for a number of decades: since 1947, it has offered weeklong ‘family camps’, intended to allow participants of all ages to ‘share their traditions and gain new life experience’ through singing, dancing, discussions, games and crafts; and since 1964, it has hosted an annual ‘folk school experience’, consisting of a four-day residential meeting which ‘affirms the joy of living through . . . fellowship’ (Danebod website).

An aim of a number of folk schools in the United States is to promote social justice through community organising. Highlander Folk School (now Highlander Research and Education Center) was the progenitor of this paradigm of folk education in the United States, and continues to serve as an inspiration for others. As noted previously, Highlander possesses a rich, noteworthy history, one which is well documented in numerous articles, books and films (including the award-winning 1985 documentary *You Got to Move*, produced by the Cumberland Mountain Educational Cooperative). Over the decades, since its founding by Miles Horton in 1932, Highlander has played a critical role in such pivotal American social justice issues as labour union disputes during the 1930s and 1940s, the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, worker safety and health issues in the 1960s and 1970s and, more recently, broader environmental, globalisation and immigration concerns.

While Highlander remains the pinnacle of social justice activism within the history of folk schools in America, other schools have similar, if perhaps more modest and local, aims. Certain folk schools routinely host events offered by like-minded organisations, thus engendering a truly collective sense of community activism. Camp Sister Spirit, for instance – located on 120 acres in the heart of the Pinebelt of southeast Mississippi – offers itself as a ‘unique location’ for conferences and retreats, with a stated mission to ‘create opportunities for meaningful and situation-specific social justice by educating on individual levels thereby extending these practices of personal change to the community as a whole’ (Camp Sister Spirit Folk School website).

Likewise, Cedar Bend Folk School in Wisconsin labels itself a ‘cooperative cultural center’, and over the years has invited a number of different social ventures to host camps, retreats, workshops and gatherings at its site (Cedar Bend Folk School website). Its current goal is to establish itself as ‘an independent cooperative retreat center with folk school-style educational programs’, with possible goals including youth and leadership development, ‘place-based education’ (that is, folk arts and building skills), ecological restoration and social entrepreneurship (*ibid.*).

Both Hopework Folk School in Minnesota and Pine Tree Folk School in Maine were founded during the early 1990s, when, according to Pine Tree’s cofounder, Jonathan Falk, there was a ‘surge of interest in folk schools around the country’ (Pine Tree Folk School website). Pine Tree’s goal was to create a school ‘rooted in people’s own culture

and experiences' in order to build a 'mass political movement' (*ibid.*), while Hopework's goal, achieved through occasional residential three-day retreats, and a month-long summer philosophy 'camp' offered in conjunction with the University of Minnesota, is 'building a more humane, just, and equitable society in which individuals reach their highest potentials and lead satisfying and meaningful lives in community with others' (Hopework Folk School website).

### ***Personal growth, creativity and self-renewal***

A number of the folk schools place an emphasis on the importance of personal growth, creativity and self-renewal. Clearing Folk School, for instance, was founded 'as a place where city people could . . . better manage the stresses and strains of everyday life in a complex and fast-paced world' (Clearing Folk School website). Villages Folk School similarly notes that it offers 'a setting in which individuals and families can connect with the "inner child" – something often lost in the busyness of living' (Villages Folk School website). Hopework aims to help 'individuals reach their highest potentials and lead satisfying and meaningful lives' (Hopework Folk School website), while Gale Woods Farm Folk School 'strives to enrich lives' (Gale Woods Farm Folk School website) and Campbell enjoins its potential participants to 'come explore your creative side' (Campbell Folk School website).

Indeed, in addition to preserving valuable cultural traditions, courses in hands-on crafts and skills are seen by many folk schools as serving the broader purpose of helping citizens to 'discover [their] creativity and nurture [their] spirit' (Villages Folk School website). As North House Folk School notes, 'traditional crafts' can be 'the medium for providing creative and meaningful experiences for individuals, families and groups' (North House Folk School website). Similarly, the newly forming Riverside Roots Folk School (which expresses homage to North House) notes its belief that 'arts and crafts are ancient and valuable means of expression, story-telling and invention' (Riverside Roots Folk School website).

Clearly, a number of folk schools see themselves as serving the valuable role of keeping tradition alive while enjoining citizens to take a step back from their busy work lives and focus on nurturing the 'whole person'.

### **Lifelong learning**

We found that the concept of 'lifelong learning', which remains a dominant guiding premise of both past and present Scandinavian folk schools, is promoted by a number of folk schools in the United States. This phrase refers to continuous learning for its own sake, rather than for any degree or work-related goals, with the aim of helping students to tap into their innate creativity. Driftless Folk School, intends to inspire 'lifelong learning for individuals and families' (Driftless Folk School website), while Gale Woods Farm Folk School has a stated goal of opening 'the door to lifelong learning' for its participants (Gale Woods Farm Folk School website). Martis Camp Folk School emphasises 'living to learn' through the hands-on courses it offers (Martis Camp Folk School website) and Pocosin Arts Folk School's three-day artist retreat is described as a 'life-long learning adult education retreat program' (Pocosin Arts Folk School website).

Several folk schools incorporate the goal of lifelong learning into their mission statement. The first of the five tenets governing North House, for instance, is to 'create a rich, positive environment that inspires lifelong learning' (North House Folk School website); similarly, the first of five principles guiding Porkies Folk School is 'nurturing a supportive . . . environment which encourages students to become lifelong learners' (Porcupine Mountains Folk School website).

### **Noncompetitive, nongraded learning**

Another enduring tenet of Scandinavian folk high schools is that courses should remain nongraded and noncompetitive – a philosophy which has carried over into American folk schools. The founder of Clearing Folk School, Jens Jensen, stressed that there was to be 'no credits, no grades, no degrees, no pitting of one student against another' (Clearing Folk School website), while North House Folk School, one of the best known folk schools in the United States, cites the Scandinavian *folkehøjskole* – with its emphasis on noncompetitive learning for its own sake – as a direct inspiration for its own guiding philosophy (North House Folk School website). Similarly, Campbell markets itself as providing a 'non-competitive, hands-on learning environment' (Campbell Folk School website), while Adirondack Folk School aims to promote a 'non-competitive environment focused on the student' (Adirondack Folk School website).

### ***Faith and worship***

While a number of folk high schools in Scandinavia have a religious focus, Danebod is the only folk school in the United States that advertises morning devotions and a Sunday ‘traditional liturgy’ service in its weeklong summer offering (Danebod website). However, we include this ‘theme’ here as an important connection to many early and some modern Scandinavian folk schools, especially in Norway (see Bagley and Rust, 2009).

### **Modern folk schools in context**

In this section, we briefly contextualise the above thematic analysis of modern folk schools in the United States by discussing key ways in which they differ from their Scandinavian counterparts, and how they fit into the larger scheme of nonformal education opportunities in the United States. We conclude by discussing the future of folk schools in the United States, and how they might benefit from looking to Scandinavia once again for renewed inspiration.

Like folk schools in the United States, folk high schools in Scandinavia have evolved over the last century and a half to meet the needs of modern citizens.

Despite some key differences, folk high schools in Scandinavia – as described in much greater detail by other authors in this book – share common goals and characteristics. These might be characterised in the following way:

- No exams or course-specific grades;
- Pedagogical freedom, emphasising personal growth and lifelong learning;
- A desire to foster respectful social and democratic participation in a boarding-school environment, with participants learning to live together despite their differences (Bagley and Rust, 2009).

How do these goals and characteristics compare with those of United States folk schools? Given their status as nonformal educational venues, folk schools in the United States are in alignment with their Scandinavian counterparts in not utilising exams or formal grades to assess students. In addition, they clearly exhibit pedagogical freedom, given that they are

independently governed and thus have the ultimate freedom to create and sustain themselves as they see fit. Finally, a number of folk schools in the United States – like those in Scandinavia – state as part of their mission a desire to encourage lifelong learning in participants.

However, while a few schools in the United States (e.g., Hopework and Danebod) offer a folk school environment in which participants can live and learn together in a microcosm of social democracy for a few days, this does not come close to the year-long boarding school opportunity provided by Scandinavian folk schools. Indeed, only a handful of the United States folk schools (Highlander, Camp Sister Spirit, Hopework, Cedar Bend) aim to foster critical democratic participation as part of their mission.

Yet, America has a long history of generating new forms of adult education to meet specific needs (Stubblefield and Keane, 1994). The Chautauqua movement, for instance, brought both entertainment and education via lectures, performances and study groups to rural communities throughout the nation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Chautauquas (named after an Iroquois Indian word) ‘attracted thousands of Americans to participate in voluntary, participatory, small-group meetings in their neighbors’ homes to learn about and discuss social, economic, and political issues’ (Pan and Mutchler, 2000, p. 2), offering ‘activities that aimed at intellectual and moral self-improvement and civic involvement’ (Colorado Chautauqua National Historic Landmark, 2011). This broad movement has been labelled – much like Scandinavian folk schools – ‘essentially a school for the people’ (Hurlbut, 1921, p. 6).

Meanwhile, there are currently numerous diverse, nonprofit training sites available for political education and movement building. A ‘study circle’ format – though directly influenced by the American Chautauqua movement rather than Scandinavian folk schools (Pan and Mutchler, 2000) – is utilised by various nonprofit organisations as a means of allowing citizens an opportunity to work together to solve communal problems. Everyday Democracy, previously known as the Study Circles Resource Center, employs study circles to ‘help people of different backgrounds and views talk and work together to solve problems and create communities that work for everyone’ (Everyday Democracy website). Similarly, the nonprofit organisation National Issues Forums – a ‘network of civic, educational, and other organisations, and individuals, whose common interest is to promote public deliberation in America’

– promotes the use of study circles and other forums to ‘bring people together to talk about important issues’ (National Issues Forums website).

Other grassroots organisations addressing similar needs include: The Ruckus Society, which aims to provide ‘environmental, human rights, and social justice organisers with the tools, training, and support needed to achieve their goals’ (Ruckus Society website); Project South, which provides (among other services) ‘Building a Movement’ workshops and institutes; Training for Change, which offers activist training; and The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond (PISAB), which provides antiracism training and organising.

One of the other primary goals met by folk schools in the United States – allowing adults to engage in noncompetitive, lifelong learning pursuits – is also met through a number of other venues, including university extension courses and community education programmes, most often offered through community colleges. American community colleges are postsecondary institutions that provide adult education and general education courses for all postsecondary students. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), in July of 2011 more than 12 million students were enrolled in community colleges, amounting to more than half of all undergraduate students in the United States. Such colleges practise an open-admissions policy and provide large numbers of traditionally underserved students with higher education. Part of the AACC’s multifaceted mission is to forge ‘community development and renewal by working to ensure access to lifelong learning to benefit individuals, communities, and society in general’ (American Association of Community Colleges website).

As some of the key goals of folk schools in the United States are also being met by other types of educational institutions, what is their future? When it comes to offering hands-on workshops on regional arts and crafts, folk schools continue to serve a unique and invaluable niche. Without folk schools, these traditions would be at risk and might not be passed along to future generations. Folk schools can also continue to serve as a valuable opportunity for harried Americans to take a step back from their busy lives and retreat to a nurturing space in nature.

Yet United States folk schools are nowhere close to offering citizens the type of invaluable opportunity for a year-long boarding school opportunity granted by their Scandinavian counterparts. To that end, funding remains an explicit issue. Without dedicated government assistance, each folk school in the United States must be completely self-

sustaining, operating as a nonprofit organisation while simultaneously marketing itself as both appealing to potential participants and worthy of donations. Several schools we analysed discuss current or recent funding campaigns and multiyear visionary statements on their websites. North House Folk School, for instance, notes that its ‘Raise the Roof’ campaign is a ‘comprehensive campaign asking donors to both continue contributing on an annual basis while also making multi-year pledges towards the capital/endowment goals’ (North House Folk School website).

The American folk schools that have survived over the years have been those which have responded effectively and swiftly to changing dynamics. Highlander has undergone numerous shifts in focus over the years in order to accommodate to external pressures and remain viable – and, like most other American folk schools, it is nonprofit and relies in part on donations to survive. Spicer (2009) notes, ‘People’s education has a long history of surviving – because it springs from and honors human life and spirit’ (p. 208). Spicer writes with enthusiasm and hope about the future of the FEAA (IPEA), noting that ‘new leadership is emerging that is framing new work through its role as a chapter of the international, Danish-based Association for World Education (AWE)’, which posits that ‘world education is based in the idea that our personal and local identity is inextricably connected to our universal and global existence’ (*ibid.*). Meanwhile, with increasing attention being paid to the benefits of a ‘gap year’ between high school and college (Gregory, 2010; Haigler and Nelson, 2005; Sparks, 2010; White, 2009), there may be renewed interest in looking toward Scandinavia’s model of folk schools as a year-long opportunity for young people to experience personal growth while living in a communal environment.

It is too soon to tell whether the handful of current folk schools across the United States will embrace this new mantle of interconnectedness, turn once again to their Scandinavian counterparts for inspiration or continue to exist primarily to serve the needs of local citizens seeking personal renewal and/or collective agency. Regardless, they remain an enduring legacy of Grundtvig’s vision, one uniquely mediated by time, culture and the needs of the people.

## Notes

- 1 The term ‘folk high school’ is not used in the United States. ‘High school’ has a very specific meaning in that it is a synonym for ‘secondary school’. Instead, ‘folk school’ is generally used.
- 2 Unless otherwise noted, all quotes from folk schools and the IPEA are taken directly from the school or organisation’s website. All website addresses are listed in a separate section at the end of this chapter.
- 3 We also talked on the telephone with representatives from the folk music schools referred to previously. However, these schools were eventually eliminated from our analysis because they did not fit our criteria for inclusion.

## Folk school websites

Name of School	Web Address
Adirondack Folk School	<a href="http://www.adirondackfolkschool.org/">http://www.adirondackfolkschool.org/</a> (retrieved 08/08/2010)
Alabama Folk School (a.k.a. McDowell Folk School)	<a href="http://www.campmcowell.com/folkschool/">http://www.campmcowell.com/folkschool/</a> (retrieved 08/08/2010)
Blue Stone Folk School	<a href="http://bluestonefolkschool.org/">http://bluestonefolkschool.org/</a> (retrieved 08/08/2010)
Camp Sister Spirit Folk School	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/pages/Camp-Sister-Spirit-Folk-School/47491299010">http://www.facebook.com/pages/Camp-Sister-Spirit-Folk-School/47491299010</a> (retrieved 08/08/2010)
Campbell Folk School	<a href="https://www.folkschool.org/">https://www.folkschool.org/</a> (retrieved 08/08/2010)
Cedar Bend Folk School	<a href="http://www.philadelphiacommunityfarm.org/cedarbend.htm">http://www.philadelphiacommunityfarm.org/cedarbend.htm</a> (retrieved 08/08/2010)
Clearing Folk School	<a href="http://theclearing.org/2010/">http://theclearing.org/2010/</a> (retrieved 08/08/2010)
Danebod Family Camp and Danebad Folk Meeting (originally Danebod Folk School)	<a href="http://www.danebod.org/">http://www.danebod.org/</a> (retrieved 08/08/2010)

Driftless Folk School	<a href="http://www.driftlessfolkschool.org/">http://www.driftlessfolkschool.org/</a> (retrieved 08/08/2010)
Gale Woods Farm Folk School	<a href="http://www.threeriversparks.org/parks/gale-woods-farm.aspx">http://www.threeriversparks.org/parks/gale-woods-farm.aspx</a> (retrieved 08/08/2010)
Highlander Research and Education Center (originally Highlander Folk School)	<a href="http://www.highlandercenter.org/">http://www.highlandercenter.org/</a> (retrieved 08/08/2010)
Hopework Folk School	<a href="http://www.hopework.org/">http://www.hopework.org/</a> (retrieved 08/08/2010)
Martis Camp Folk School	<a href="http://www.martiscamp.com/">http://www.martiscamp.com/</a> (retrieved 08/08/2010)
North House Folk School	<a href="http://www.northhouse.org/">http://www.northhouse.org/</a> (retrieved 08/08/2010)
Ocrafolk School	<a href="http://www.ocrafolkschool.org/">http://www.ocrafolkschool.org/</a> (retrieved 08/08/2010)
Ozark Folk School	<a href="http://www.ozarkfolkcenter.com/">http://www.ozarkfolkcenter.com/</a> (retrieved 08/08/2010)
Pine Tree Folk School	<a href="http://www.ptfolkschool.org/">http://www.ptfolkschool.org/</a> (retrieved 08/08/2010)
Pocosin Arts Folk School	<a href="http://www.pocosinarts.org/">http://www.pocosinarts.org/</a> (retrieved 08/08/2010)
Porcupine Mountains Folk School ('Porkies' or PMFS)	<a href="http://www.porkies.org/folk.html">http://www.porkies.org/folk.html</a> (retrieved 08/08/2010)
Riverside Roots Folk School	<a href="http://riversideroots.org/">http://riversideroots.org/</a> (retrieved 08/08/2010)
Villages Folk School	<a href="http://villagesfolkschool.com/">http://villagesfolkschool.com/</a> (retrieved 08/08/2010)

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

# Rhetoric and implementation: The folk high school tradition and the folk development colleges of Tanzania

*Alan Rogers*

In the late 1970s, some 52 folk development colleges (FDCs) based explicitly on the model of the Scandinavian folk high schools (FHSs) were created in Tanzania as a result of interaction between President Nyerere of Tanzania and Sweden. Financial and technical assistance came from the Swedish government as part of the international aid programme of the time which saw as one of its main goals an increase in a more equitable form of globalisation; and moral support came from the FHSs in Sweden as part of a wider movement which saw the spread of northern adult education activities, including study circles and cooperatives, into many parts of the world. But this case is unusual in that Swedish support, both financial and ideological, continued for more than twenty years, and other forms of support have continued since 1995. This chapter, therefore, provides a case study in the interaction between two distinct cultures, over a lengthy period, providing an opportunity to study international transfers of educational ideas and especially issues of rhetoric and implementation.

The chapter is based on a series of visits to a range of FDCs in Tanzania and to Sweden undertaken in the 1990s<sup>1</sup> and on a review of the literature (summarised in Rogers, 2000), brought up-to-date as far as possible with data gathered with the help of a number of people.<sup>2</sup>

## The foundation

The genesis of this programme has been described many times. The idealism of Nyerere, the keenness of adult educators in Sweden to see their national vision of adult education (rather than the Danish version, see Wieslander, 2000) performed in Africa, the (alleged) shared but in fact different socialist ideologies of the partners, have been discussed at length (see Abel, 1992; Adams, 1981; Sundén, 1984; Toivaiainen, 1995; Unsicker, 1987). What, perhaps, has not been stressed enough, is the gap between the rhetoric of the time and the actual implementation. The rhetoric was – and remains – strong. ‘In *Education for Self-reliance*, Nyerere (1967) . . . called for education to be refocused towards developing an enquiring mind, ability to learn from what others do, and to adapt to modern knowledge to solve local problems’ (Wedgwood, 2005, p. 45); and even today the Tanzanian development vision states that:

*Education should be treated as a strategic agent for mindset transformation and for the creation of a well-educated nation, sufficiently equipped with the knowledge needed to competently and competitively solve the Development challenges which face the nation. In this light, the education system should be restructured and transformed qualitatively with a focus on promoting creativity and problem solving (Vision 2025).*

Such rhetoric was a key feature in the transfer of FHSs to Tanzania in the form of FDCs.

The creation of the FDC network in the 1970s needs to be seen within its context of adult and vocational education in Tanzania (King, 1986; Mushi, 1991). In the 1960s, Farmers’ Training Centres, established by the Ministry of Agriculture, and District Training Centres, established by the Ministry of Rural Development, along with Regional Administration to train teachers in literacy programmes and community leaders for self-help projects and women’s groups had been brought together into Rural Training Centres. It was on these that most of the new FDCs were founded in the later 1970s (Mosha, 1985). Relatively few new FDCs were created. They formed a small part of a wider scene of small local training organisations in adult literacy and vocational training. Other agencies were offering similar training on a substantial scale in church trade schools and private training centres (Bennell *et*

al., 1999). Radio-study groups, farmer training programmes and correspondence tuition all contributed to rural adult education (Hinzen and Hundsdorfer, 1979; Unsicker, 1987). At about the same time, some 3,000 postprimary technical centres were being planned with donor (DANIDA) support (ILO, 2001, p.90) to offer some forms of vocational training.

But the FDCs were to be different. Much of the rhetoric was based on that of Sweden, where the FHSs, independent of the state but 'partly state-subsidised', were 'to give the students insights into their responsibilities as individuals and as citizens. They should be organised so that the students' abilities to work co-operatively are strengthened, their abilities for independent thought and critical judgment are developed and their maturity and interest in study is encouraged' (1958 FHS decree, cited in Boucher, 1982, p. 155). Their 'main importance lies in strengthening the self-confidence of the participants, increasing their understanding and respect for other people's opinions and in this way contributing towards the democratization of society' (Abrahamsson, 1996, p. 173). No mention here of vocational skills. The folk high schools were, and are still in many cases, providers of general civic education from a sociocultural perspective. The work of these institutions was to be founded on *rootedness* (initially based on nationalistic cultural values, later based on the experience of the local community), *flexibility* (adapted to varied local cultures) and *enlightenment* (in part overcoming the darkness of ignorance and in part arriving at constructed knowledge through peer interaction and dialogue). Of course, few FHSs were in fact like this but the rhetoric was strong as an ideal to be aimed for (Simon, 1960).

If the rhetoric of the FHSs in Sweden was not always visible in the implementation, the gap between rhetoric and implementation in Tanzania was just as great. We need to appreciate that in Tanzania there was also a gap between the rhetoric of Nyerere and some of his government, with his special brand of socialism (*ujamaa*) and its implementation at local level. It was not just a question of Swedish idealism versus the reality in Tanzania; it was a complicated picture of contrasting world visions and aspirations.

## **Reinterpretations of the vision**

The FHSs' vision in Tanzania had to be reinterpreted in many ways, of which four seem the most important. Not all of these were envisaged during the exchange process. These reinterpretations brought a number of criticisms, not just from Swedish supporters of the FDCs but also from others, and these grew over time.

### ***Development***

The context of Tanzania was very different from that of Sweden. The country was part of the global international aid movement in which international definitions of and goals for development, including education, 'literacy' and 'illiteracy', dominated local policy-making. The FDCs were called upon to implement the national strategies for economic and social development in a socialist (albeit substantially devolved) state: i.e. to train adults in the skills required for socialist village development (Unsicker, 1987). Hence the change in the title of these institutions. Under Nyerere, with his concept of self-reliance, development was not entirely a process of modernisation, although it still implied that rural ignorance and 'traditional' practices needed reform – a 'needs', rather than an 'aspirations'-based approach: 'The programme was launched as a national strive to provide Tanzania adults with the knowledge and skills in order to do away with poverty, ignorance and diseases hence to bring about economic, social, political and cultural development' (Ndamgoba, 2008, p. 12).

Under Nyerere, 'development' was not to be achieved through a liberal approach to individual self-fulfilment but through social engineering by the state; not so much by expanding urban communities with formal, economic sector activities as by the collectivisation of farming and village communities, and the expansion of the informal economy with skill training. Thus, the FDCs were to offer a range of provision but with an agricultural bias (Gwasa, 1976). As the following observation points out:

*They were originally conceived as institutions for training rural people for useful service to their communities, to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of productive labour, and in so doing improve the quality of life for all . . . to enhance rural skills and combat urban migration*  
(Kent and Mushi, 1995, p. 44).

It was anticipated that they would solve community problems, enhance opportunities for self-employment, (URT 1978, cited in Ndamgoba, 2008), promote technical and business skills and provide unemployed youths with vocational skills to gain employment.

This is a different model from the liberal agenda of the Swedish FHSs. But there was enough in the rhetoric to keep the links, since training groups of village elites to build ‘the capacity of communities to identify, decide, plan and implement development projects’ (Economic Survey, 2003, p. 6) was akin to the FHS agenda for adults who had not always progressed into further or higher education. The emphasis on social transformation through individual personal growth rather than structural change (which is why both programmes have only a minor concern with gender structural change, see Oglesby, 1997) is shared.

### ***Clientele***

Secondly, the student population of the FDCs was necessarily different from that of the FHSs. Large numbers of adults in Tanzania had had no schooling at all and others had had very inadequate schooling. The FDCs were to be the third stage in the national adult learning programme – basic literacy, functional literacy and then the FDCs in order to meet the needs and challenges of postliteracy continuing education (Kassam, 1978; Mosha, 1985; Unsicker, 1986). They were intended for adult literacy graduates. The fact that in practice those who attended the FDCs were young persons, rather than more mature adults, shows once again the gap between rhetoric and implementation. From very early times, the FDCs appealed to students straight from school rather than adults exploring new forms of learning (apparently something of the same can be seen in some of the Scandinavian FHSs but not to the same degree). Most of the colleges failed to attract adequate numbers of students – they were substantially under-used. Some two-thirds of the students were men, and there was a withdrawal rate (often called pejoratively ‘drop-outs’, but students do not ‘drop out’, they withdraw for a reason) of about 15 per cent. (The colleges have also been used by other government and NGO bodies, such as the ILO ‘Rural Youth and Training Groups’, library services, TANU, etc., for specific training programmes, and sometimes the statistics of ‘students’ at the college include the participants in these programmes.)

### **Flexibility**

Thirdly, the flexibility in management, agendas and teaching practices inherent within the democratic and participatory Swedish FHSs was limited in Tanzania.

In Sweden, the FHSs were run by many different organisations (churches, trade unions, municipalities, temperance bodies, political parties, etc.) and were very different from each other. They maintained ‘arms-length’ distance from government, separate, yet close enough to influence and receive from government. In Tanzania, rather than seek out trade unions, faith groups and voluntary bodies to found the FDCs, the Swedes agreed that the implementing body would be the government. The FDCs were to be one arm of government – and hence exactly the same throughout the country. Why the FHSs abandoned a key element in their ideology in this programme has never been explained.

The FDCs are a national system, uniform in governance and staffing, with a state-provided curriculum and formal teaching–learning methodologies. FHSs are institutions ‘at complete liberty to decide the emphasis and content of educational activities for themselves’ (Abrahamsson, 1996, p. 173; also see Boucher, 1982, p. 155 ‘each school is . . . free to design its own curriculum’). In contrast, the FDCs are, on the whole, a one-size-fits-all programme. Some FDCs, especially those close to the larger cities, have developed some freedom to experiment with courses and other activities, in part as the result of continuing support from Sweden, but they are a small minority. Unlike the FHSs, the FDCs are not a voluntary association of educational bodies in a variety of forms, run by many different agencies but supported by the state, sharing a common vision; they are government agencies, instruments of national policies and programmes.

The FHSs were seen as an alternative school system, separate from the formal education sector: ‘there were many claims in the folk high school sector that it required a special teacher training programme for its teaching staff, since the aims and objectives of the movement are different from those of primary and secondary schools’ (Kasimir, 1991, p. 194; also see Rubenson, 1982). Historically, the folk high schools kept their distance from other sectors of education and regarded themselves as an alternative to these (Jacobsen, 1982). In Tanzania, although some teachers from the formal sector transferred into the FDCs in the early stages of their development, currently the training, qualifications and

career prospects of the FDC staff are separate. The FDC sector, like the FHSs, has ‘become a world to itself, cut off from the surrounding [educational] community’ (Rydstrom, 1995, p. 144). This, however, is probably due not only to the FHS influence but also to the fact that Nyerere, when setting them up, saw them as part of the national adult literacy campaign, and he felt this too should be kept away from the formal educational system.

Nevertheless, the FDCs are to all intents and purposes educational institutions similar to schools. Instead of teaching–learning methodologies adapted to the preferred learning styles of the students, the FDCs, almost without exception, employ formal teaching–learning practices. Instead of horizontal teacher–learner relationships, the FDCs are characterised by vertical relationships, with power restricted to the teacher. The teaching–learning methodologies have come in for the greatest criticism: ‘The emphasis was on leading trainees through a series of cook-book exercises that afforded the trainee little opportunity for creative or problem solving activity. Great emphasis was placed on the correct selection and safe use of materials and tools’ (Kent and Mushi, 1995, p. 31; also see Biswalo, 1987). Increasingly, the students requested the taking of national vocational qualification tests, because they found that the FDC certificates were not widely recognised (Qualifications, 2009).

### ***Critical judgment***

Fourthly, the loudly trumpeted aim of the FHSs to help develop critical judgement met the Tanzanian epistemology. There is a perception both outside and inside Tanzania that critical thinking is not part of Tanzanian culture. The FDCs should ‘prepare Tanzanians to develop their personalities and their capacity to think and to help them understand national policies, international affairs, further education’ (Mosha, 1983, p. 98). Recent studies of critical thinking in international perspectives have pointed out that there are different ways of exercising critical judgment, and that this requirement by western educators

*contradicted values emphasised in [the students’] previous education. A Tanzanian student questioned: ‘How critical is critical? I’ve been taught all my life not to criticise my teacher’ (Robinson-Pant, 2009, p. 421).*

It would seem the Swedish supporters of the FDCs did not appreciate that persuading FDC teachers to promote direct critical approaches among their students could be seen as a cultural imposition. ‘Learning the [western] ways of “being critical” involved an educational process with which some . . . students did not feel comfortable: openly challenging the teacher . . . or texts by authorities on their subject’ (Robinson-Pant, 2009, p. 421). But in the end this is a *political*, as much as a cultural, matter: providing state funding for ‘free and voluntary popular education that is self-governing’ (Rubenson, 1993, p. 54; see also Arvidson and Gustavsson, 1996, pp. 647–648) and which could be critical of government itself, as in Sweden, is not an activity which successive governments in Tanzania would support.

## **Commentary**

All these and other agendas came to be mixed up. Kassam, in his description of the FDCs, combined many of them: the FDCs were to facilitate individual students in ‘the transition from primary school’ into adult work, ‘improving adult literacy and lifelong education [for] the promotion of employment and decent work’; ‘training rural people for useful service to their communities’; ‘providing residential educational opportunities, both general and vocational, for rural development, . . . to answer real and practical needs at village level’ (Kassam, 1978). The FDCs were to be all things to all men – and sometimes to women.

It is, however, important not to see the FDCs solely as having failed to meet the expectations of the Scandinavian FHSs. Rather, the distinction is internal to Tanzania. The FDCs turned out to be different from the vision of their founder, Nyerere. It was a case that he went shopping for one thing but found in the end that he had something different in his shopping basket. His take on the FHSs was a national system of about 100 government educational institutions, closely tied to the party (it was, after all, a socialist state) that would train a cadre of leaders for the new villages he was creating under his policy of ujamaa. (Spalding, 1996; the issue of the relationship of this Gramscian cadre to traditional village leaders was never solved; it is true they were to be servants rather than lords of the village but the issue of power was in fact not faced). What he got was a smaller network of vocational training institutions. He tried to combine both the practical subjects and the FHS agenda into one curriculum: ‘agriculture and livestock, carpentry, motor mechanics,

domestic science and home economics, accountancy and bookkeeping, economics, political education, mathematics and culture', but in practice he got a curriculum of 'carpentry, masonry, tailoring, mechanics, electrical installation, computers, agriculture, electronics, shoemaking, hotel management, etc' (Ndamgoba, 2008). Instead of flexible courses and democratic teaching-learning approaches, he got fixed terms and formal teacher-centred methodologies.

The difference between the vision and implementation of the programme at the centre and at the localities generated internal tensions. It has been suggested that such disagreements lie at the heart of many governments, between the mission of the centre and the technicist approach of the peripheries. But it can also be argued that the local government officials and the staff of the FDCs, being that much closer and more responsive (because ultimately responsible) to 'the people', gave them what they wanted – instrumental training for their sons and daughters.

Equally, it is surely a mistake to see this as a failure; it is indeed a success. After all some 52 FDCs were established and today (with one or two changes) a group of some 53 FDCs remain. Statements about the limited range of subjects (see Mangesho, 2008) and the fact that the curriculum is centrally designed (Kent and Mushi, 1995) disregard the fact that the curriculum is in fact a 'menu curriculum', and that the FDCs can and do choose from the range of subjects, although limited by their own resources, staffing and the demands of the local community (in that order). The formal teaching methods may be a necessary first step, time and the cost to the students not allowing for further development beyond the initial stages of competency into creativity. The criticism that about one quarter of all graduates from the FDCs migrated to the towns means that at least three quarters went back to the villages; the desire for formal qualifications is an indication that the courses have become increasingly valued by the students. These and other criticisms, the strongest from Sweden and at times taken up by some in Tanzania, continue the strongly ethnocentric deficit approach of the early Swedish adult educators (Dahlstedt and Nordvall, 2011); looking for what the 'other' was *not* doing or being, they failed to look positively at what the 'other' *is* doing or being, seeking to understand and appreciate difference. The FDCs were and are doing a good deal, but they are doing it differently.

## TANDEM

As criticisms grew, some of those closely associated with the Swedish FHSs (especially Linköping University) in the late 1980s launched a programme, TANDEM (a short form of Tanzania and democracy, but referring also to the explicit ambition of being a two-part joint project between Sweden and Tanzania). This had two main strands: first, to 'return the FDCs to the Grundtvig vision' (TANDEM documents, 1992; see Cars, 2006); and secondly, to introduce learner-centred teaching-learning methodologies, especially 'participatory pedagogy'. It was an ambitious project of training for ministry staff, principals, trainers and FDC teaching staff, starting with extended training in Sweden for a small group of teaching staff, then on to training programmes in Tanzania using some of these trained staff and finally widening out to include all 52 FDCs. There were other strands to the project, such as the creation of a sorely needed EMIS (Educational Management Information Service) for the FDCs (Rogers *et al.*, 1997).

But the initiative had limited success, in part through factors extraneous to the project. For at the same time as the project was launched (1990), the FDCs were moved from the Education Ministry into the Community Development Ministry; and a debate arose as to whether the FDCs should be seen as 'community development centres' or 'adult educational/training institutions' (URT, 1996). The Ministry spoke of 'two cultures', adult education and community development, and the different opinions were seen in confrontational terms. In these circumstances, it was difficult for TANDEM to achieve their goals; for working with small groups of staff to implement different educational strategies could be (and in fact was) seen as trying to get some staff onto the 'adult education' side. Postcolonial resentment was still strong in Tanzania (e.g., see Gwasa, 1976).

SIDA's (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) withdrawal of financial support to the FDCs after more than 20 years (delayed at the request of the Tanzanian government by two years) and the reduction of the budget to the FDCs from the Tanzanian government by two thirds in the light of the collapse of the economy in the mid-1990s, forced the colleges to increase student fees and to focus more on their income generation activities, such as the 'adoption of day-training schemes in tailoring, carpentry, agriculture and other production-oriented activities to generate income or also to save on

boarding and lodging expenses . . . The FDCs have more potential for income-generating activities especially in the fields of automechanics, farming, brick/block-laying and home economics activities' (Bennell *et al.*, 1999, p. 122). All this coming at the same time meant that the TANDEM project faced unprecedented obstacles. That a good deal was achieved is remarkable in the light of the gloom that descended on the whole sector: 'The FDCs in Tanzania appear to have overstayed; . . . their financial problems seem to be still worse [than other Vocational Training Centres], probably affecting training quality even more than in other VTCs. In all, one wonders if they still are community development centres' (ILO, 1990, p. 26).

But at the same time, the project was vitiated by the somewhat negative approach of some of the Swedish implementers to the FDCs. In the training programmes, they were profoundly unsympathetic to the desire of local people for trade training (Rogers, 2000). They found it hard to find any good word to say about the existing FDC programme, except when it squared with their own interpretation of the mission of the FDCs as alternative FHSs, as can be seen in the recent apologia for the project (Albinson *et al.*, 2002; see also Norbeck, 2002).

## **FDCs today**

And yet the FDCs have survived and indeed taken on something of a new lease of life. While the pessimism seems to have lasted for some years (and in places may continue to exist), the FDCs are emerging apparently strengthened.

There is great difficulty in getting accurate information about this sector today, even the number of FDCs currently operating, but no figure gives it as less than 53, almost the same number as when they started. Since it appears that some FDCs have been converted into Community Development Training Institutes and some Farmers Training Centres have been included among the FDCs, the sector shows some signs of adaptability.

Most remarkably, the student body has multiplied by five times – unless the basis for calculating these numbers has changed. In a paper prepared in April 2008 for CONFINTEA by the Ministry of Education (but using figures issued by the Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children which is responsible for the FDCs), participation is said to have risen from 5,875 in 2000–2001 to 27,907 in 2006–2007;

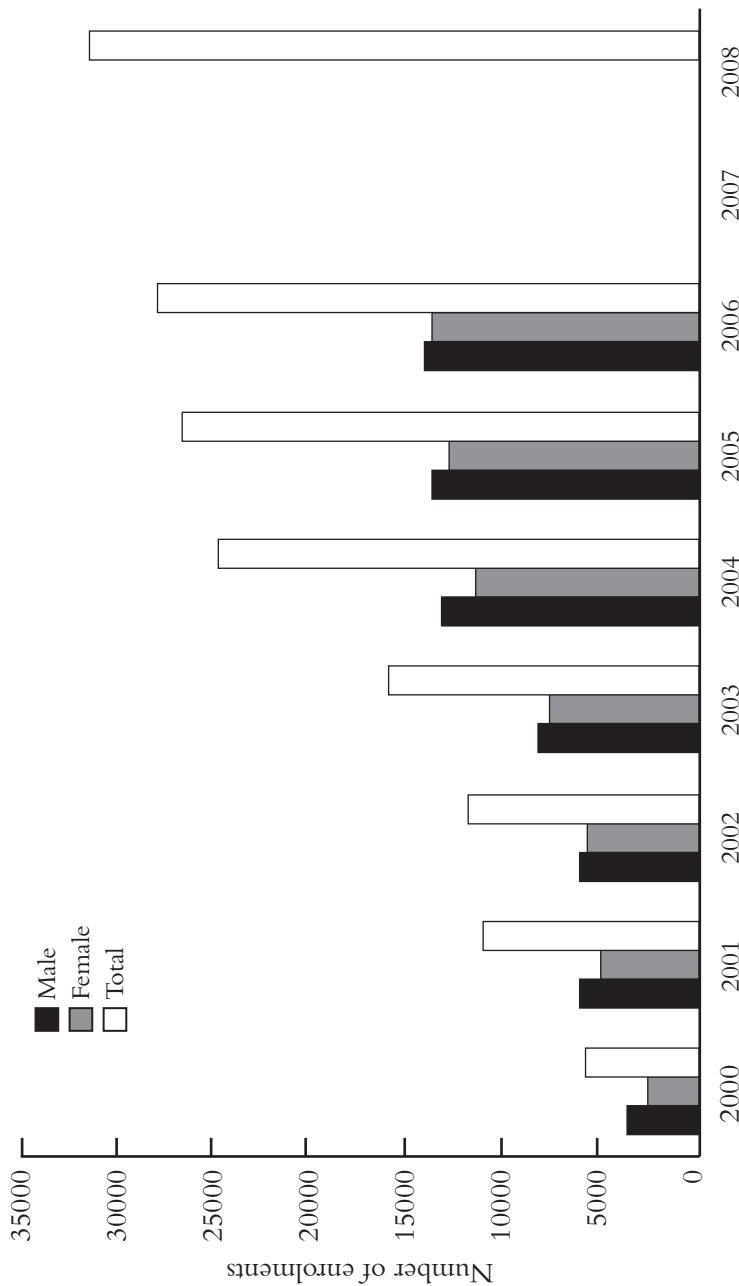
and these figures have been updated to 31,493 in 2008–2009 (Executive Summary, 2008).<sup>3</sup> This rise has not been a steady progress – figures doubled between 2000 and 2002, and jumped again between 2003 and 2004, after which they rose more gradually (CONFINTEA, 2008, p. 32). Today, it has been estimated that there are some 6,000 students on long-term courses, some 15,000 students on short in-college courses and 10,000 participants on outreach activities (including support to local projects and income generation groups) (Ndamgoba, 2008). These are central government figures; information about exactly what is going on in each FDC is not always available. But however these figures may be interpreted, the FDCs have not sunk; most of them are actively sailing.

Despite some reorientation of the FDCs to community development, the goals remain the same – to remedy a deficit, rather than promote an aspirational model of development. The FDCs are ‘aimed at preparing adults by imparting knowledge and skills essential to deal effectively with their environment in order to liberate themselves from poverty, ignorance, disease and hence bring about socio-economic development’ (URT, 2001, p. 15). They are unique in providing opportunities for teaching self-employment to artisans (Mg’ethe *et al.*, 2008). A recent report produced by the ministry, in its Executive Summary, said: ‘The objectives of the training are to equip the participants (adult Tanzanians) with knowledge and skills that would enable them to be self-employed and self-reliant’; but (remembering that it must report to a Ministry of Community Development) it added: ‘enhancing their understanding as well as enabling them to solve their immediate problems that arise in the society’ (Executive Summary, 2008, p. 1).

The colleges are still small: six staff per college is the norm, and there is a major shortfall in the recruitment of staff (Ndamgoba, 2008). The government has formulated a folk education development programme (FEDP), and the colleges themselves have embraced a programme of education for students with disabilities, launched in 2005 under the title of ‘inclusive education’ in association with the Tanzanian Association for Mental Health.

But funding remains an issue. In very rough figures, the government contribution to the colleges is said to have risen from 66 per cent to 84 per cent, income generation activities remain at about 10 per cent. Student fees – raised in the late 1990s when the financial crisis hit the country and SIDA withdrew its support – provide the remainder. But the colleges are still very short of funds, especially for building maintenance

**Figure 11.1** Enrolments in Folk Development Colleges, 2000–2008



and teaching-learning materials; the latest figures available are that some 30,500 T Sh are spent on staff costs per student, only some 500 T Sh are available for all other costs. The introduction of fees for students means of course that, like all other sectors of Tanzanian education (Samoff, 1974; 1990a; 1990b), the FDCs, while contributing on a very small scale to the economic development of Tanzania, are now contributing to the increase of inequality in the country; only the well-to-do rural families can afford to support a member at the college. Unfortunately there is inadequate research into the nature of the enrolments to be sure that the colleges are not being appropriated by the richer elements in rural society at the expense of the poor.

The college clientele – at least for long-term courses – is now almost exclusively young school-leavers. Formally, a standard seven in formal education is required for admission to the FDCs, but adults with literacy difficulties are also enrolled (Ndamgoba, 2008). Some, FDCs like that at Bigwa, urge those ‘who have not completed primary or secondary school’ to enrol (Bigwa FDC website). ‘The target is now primary school leavers and gradually also Form IV secondary school leavers’ (ILO, 2001, p. 90). There is some concern about the gender balance: on the long term courses, men outweigh women by two to one, although in short term courses, there appear to be more women than men, and in the outreach, the numbers are more even. However, traditional gender divisions exist in many subject areas. (CONFINTEA, 2008).

### ***Commentary***

Thus, the FDCs are not FHSs. The mission has, if anything, become clearer: ‘FDCs are community-based institutions providing knowledge and skills to adults and youths who are the immediate producers of goods and services in Tanzania communities’ (Ndamgoba, 2008). But the rhetoric remains and includes strengthening democratic leadership, enhancing understanding, solving problems that arise in the society, along with general subjects aimed at widening horizons including environmental education, gender, civics, leadership, house-keeping and principles of good governance alongside other subjects aimed at enhancing income generating activities such as business, entrepreneurship, market and credit referrals. Thus ‘at Bigwa, we offer the students a chance to learn a skill (tailoring, carpentry, masonry, domestic electrical installations, gardening and cooking). At the same time they can continue with academic learning (languages, business studies, etc.).

We use our small, but well-organised library to encourage all students to read more widely, about any subjects that interest them. Every student has library sessions in their timetable' (Bigwa FDC website).

But they are still primarily vocational colleges for young people rather than residential liberal education centres for adults. Every evaluation of the FDCs has noticed this trend. The statement that 'they sought to transfer relevant skills for agriculture and other community-based *economic* activities, together with providing literacy skills and promoting Tanzanian culture' (ILO, 2001, p. 90, my italics) reveals that the vocational skills training is more important than any leadership and general liberal education. In recent years the FDCs stopped their short courses for adults and now focus on pre-employment vocational training for youth (ILO, 2001, p. 90). In other words, the FDCs are no longer any different from many vocational training centres as they have similar objectives, target groups, training approaches, curriculum and impact, as well as financial problems (ILO, 2001, p. 92).

Thus, instead of an academic and humanities curriculum, the focus is on practical skills training. Many colleges prepare students for and submit them to the national examinations so that they can obtain accreditation that is widely recognised: at the last count, some 4,000 students took VETA (Vocational Educational and Training Authority) tests and the number appears to be growing. Instrumental ends rather than structural social transformation are their main concern. This may be inconsistent perhaps with the 'needs' as identified by outside agencies, but not inconsistent with local demand. What is not clear is how much decentralisation there is in practice; a new curriculum is in course of preparation by the ministry and it may be that the menu of choices available to the colleges will be increased, allowing for greater flexibility in response to local conditions. But resources will be needed at the local level for that to be effective.

Since SIDA ended its long years of collaboration in this sector, a number of other donors have stepped in – but on a small scale. Several of these operated before the withdrawal. Tools for vocational training were provided to some colleges. The joint association of FDCs and FHSS (Karibu) which promotes linkages between individual FDCs and their Scandinavian counterparts, has managed to continue some of the links with Scandinavian countries (such as Färnebo in Sweden with Ilula) and other agencies in the richer countries. The Japanese agency (JICA) at Mtwara and the exchange visits made by Cranbrook School in the

UK are examples of these – and they indicate that some autonomy is available to the FDCs to explore alternative ways of obtaining resources for their work.

One feature of these link activities is revealing of another trend. Some FDCs have engaged in a range of photographic activities where the students and exhibitions of this work have been shown outside of Tanzania, for example, in Sweden (at Linköping) and the UK (at Northampton). These are (perhaps small) signs of an increase in the active learning methodologies that Linköping sought to promote through the TANDEM project.

### **Conclusion: the dangers of cultural transfer in adult education**

How then may we interpret this story of a cultural transfer? The study of cultural transfer (the transfer of an element which has grown up within one culture into a different cultural context) is well established, especially in the fields of management and psychology (see, e.g., Valsiner, 2003; also Bhagat *et al.*, 2002; Borden and Tanner, 1983; Kaiser, 1996; Kostova, 1999; Ogbor and Williams, 2003; Wei, 2009). But all such discussions cannot be free from ideological constraints and the discourses in which they are expressed. Thus, some will see such transfers in terms of aid, others in terms of cultural imperialism, provoking local resistance. Abdi and Kapoor have spoken of ‘the absurdity of value imposition in the name of development’ (Abdi and Kapoor, 2008, p. viii).

It is important to appreciate that we are not talking about the transfer of institutions but of practices – for ‘culture is a verb’. Thus the creation of FDCs was not a case of the transfer of institutions or technology; what was being transferred was a set of educational practices based on a certain ideology and set of values (see Eyssartier *et al.*, 2008). These practices, values and ideologies had grown and changed over many years in Scandinavia; they were never hard and fast but always organic. So that it is not surprising that some people were arguing that Grundtvig’s ideas could be sown and could grow elsewhere, but they could not be transferred directly to other countries; ‘Swedish folk development education is a method that can be emulated rather than imitated. It should be regarded as an inspiration and not as a blueprint’ (cited in Rydstrom, 1995, p. 144). In these circumstances, it would be necessary to search for a suitable soil in which to plant these ideas, to identify

compatible elements on which to build. Which is why TANDEM sought a small number of willing FDCs to start with, before trying to reach the wider FDC public. Ignoring local circumstances and the demands and aspirations of the local people would lead to failure, as international assistance to environmental education has shown. Indeed, some people argue that the implementation of an approach in different cultures can never be successfully achieved (Borden and Tanner, 1983).

Two general trends in the immediate context need to be borne in mind in analysing this transfer of the FHSs to Tanzania. First, the postcolonial analysis of development aid projects, which was strong at the time and remains of considerable significance today, leads to an increased understanding of ‘the pervasive saturation of knowledges, academic practices and education systems with colonial and neo-colonial ideologies’ (Hickling-Hudson, 2004, p. 7). As has been shown, the Swedes constructed their own identities as well as the identities of the Tanzanians in value-laden terms (Dahlstedt and Nordvall, 2011). The issues of power in intercultural interactions, and of identities and difference, mean that not only the receiving culture needs to be analysed but also the initiating culture. The FHSs came from a particular context with a definite hierarchy of values – that liberal education is better than vocational education; that participatory pedagogies are better than teacher-centred transfer of knowledge and skills; that nonformal education is better than formal schooling; and so on. But the occasion of cultural transfer can and perhaps should be a means by which the transmitters can analyse their own assumptions and values more closely – and a cause to challenge them on issues of the valuing of alternative identities and difference (see Sundén, 2002). Interculturalism (as many have shown) can be seen as ‘interaction between equals’ on the basis that both parties are increasing in consciousness, questioning their own identities and ideologies, learning from each other and changing (see for example, Aikman, 1999). It cannot be one-sided. It is not at all clear what the Swedish FHSs feel that they have learned and how they have changed from this intercultural encounter, however much they claim to have learned from the exchange.

Secondly, this particular transfer was taking place within a context of changing values in the field of adult and lifelong education itself: as Field and others have shown, adult education aimed at social transformation was in the process of becoming a ‘minority tradition, tolerated but clearly marginal to a system of provision that [is] increasingly instrumental and

vocational or consumerist in character' (Field, 2005, p. 12). Even within vocational education, agencies which sought to promote so-called generic skills rather than simply trade-based skills (LWG, March 2010) found it hard to gain acceptance for their views.

The danger is essentialism – of polarising between ‘the west and the rest’, between north and south, between liberal and vocational, between the FHSs and the FDCs. The appreciation and valuing of multiple identities is, frankly, hard to achieve. But ‘subjects and identities are multiple, diverse and contested’ (Ninnes and Mehta, 2004, p. 13). Similarly, the dichotomy of donor and recipient needs to be challenged, moving towards full partnership, in which both parties work together to plan and implement an agreed programme of development, openly admitting the differences in values and approaches. It is understood that a new plan of staff training is being planned in Scandinavia for some of the FDCs. If this is intended to ‘bring them back to the vision’, it is likely to achieve very little. But if it recognises that the FDCs are not FHSs but primarily local training institutes for young people from rural areas with some outreach work, institutions from which the FHSs can learn, if it does not use the power inherent in the relationships between Sweden and Tanzania to promote a Swedish vision of adult education, but instead to help the FDCs to increase their human and physical resources so that they can achieve more of what they want to do, to provide vocational training to young people more effectively, then it will no doubt be received with enthusiasm, and the FDCs will continue to make strides on their own road to development while the FHSs will also change.

And a further polarity needs also to be examined, if not challenged – that between a liberal and a vocational curriculum. A so-called ‘liberal’ curriculum can be taught in a dogmatic way that closes down all alternative thinking (some of the followers of Freire have been in danger of doing that). Equally a vocational curriculum can be taught in a way that opens up new possibilities, that challenges existing assumptions, that promotes explorations of alternatives – although it rarely is taught in such a fashion. But it is not impossible to teach carpentry and tailoring in a way which leads to an exploration of fashions, consumerism and the sustainability of resources such as timber, to teach nutrition with an eye on the market availability of foodstuffs, leading to a discussion of economics, globalisation, environmental issues and gender norms in consumption. It is possible in all technical training to suggest ways in which change can and perhaps should be brought about. And that will

fulfill some (if not all) of the goals of the FHSs: for even in Sweden ‘an increase in . . . vocationally oriented courses according to student demand’ can be seen in a number of FHSs, and these institutions are sometimes seen as an alternative to formal secondary schooling’ (Boucher, 1982, p. 157; Kasimir, 1991, p. 190). ‘Start where *they* are, with what *they* want to do’, is still a useful aphorism of adult education. The recent UNESCO World Report on Cultural Diversity has called for urgent steps to preserve, value and promote diversity in cultures. If further assistance to the Tanzanian FDCs is given in a way which will promote their differences and not seek to make them into African folk high schools, this will be true to the vision of Grundtvig.

## Notes

- 1 Undertaken in association with Dr Alan Chadwick and Dr Leno Oglesby who joined in all our discussions but who cannot be held responsible for the views expressed in this chapter.
- 2 I am grateful to those who provided me with information, especially Dr Joel Samoff, Mr D Ndamgoba of the Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children in Dar es Salaam, Dr Hilary Dachi, Dr Cathy Kell, Anders Frankenberg of the Swedish embassy in Dar es Salaam, Linda Rosen and J.D.M. Mpoki.
- 3 The Economic Survey of 2003 Special Issue, Development in different sectors of the economy, reveals that the figures for 2000 to 2003 appear only to include students on long-term courses; they suggest that in 2002–2003, the figures were 7,489 long course students, 10,007 short course students and 4,872 outreach participants, a total of 13,263, higher than those given in the CONFINTEA paper. Another set of figures gives 15,263 students in 2001–2002, again higher than the CONFINTEA figures (Executive Summary, 2008), which again suggests the CONFINTEA figures omit the short course and/or the outreach figures. There is no possibility of reconciling all the various figures.

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

# The influence of the Scandinavian model of popular education and lifelong learning in Japan

*Yukiko Sawano*

### Introduction

This chapter will review research on Scandinavian popular education in Japan since the early twentieth century and discuss how the introduction of the concept has influenced nonformal education practice in Japan at different stages. The Scandinavian model of education has been viewed as an ideal in Japan for a long time. In the first half of the twentieth century, there was a strong interest in Danish popular education based on the idea of N.F.S. Grundtvig. When the concepts of lifelong learning and continuing education were introduced in Japan through UNESCO and OECD in the early 1970s, interest in Swedish adult education and lifelong learning emerged. In twenty-first-century Japan, struggling with a long-lasting economic crisis and recession, some Japanese economists are also looking at Swedish popular education as a key to sustainable development. Increased international mobility during the last two decades has facilitated visits to Scandinavian countries by more and more Japanese researchers and lay people who have brought back new insights into Scandinavian popular education and practice.

Being a specialist of comparative research in education and lifelong learning policies for more than a quarter of a century, I have been

interested in the crossnational and transnational influences of education and learning culture (see Sawano 2000; 2003; 2006; 2009; 2010). ‘Policy borrowing’ was one of the purposes of conducting comparative education research in the process of modernisation and systematisation of education in many countries in the nineteenth century. Recently, there is a growing interest among comparative education researchers in a historical analysis of borrowing ideas and educational transfer (Phillips and Ochs, 2004; Shibata, 2004; Steiner-Khamisi, 2004). K. Ochs and D. Phillips (2004) identified four stages of education policy borrowing, starting from ‘crossnational attraction’ by different actors, which develops to influence ‘decision-making’ on education and ‘implementation’ by various institutions and government, and ultimately leads to ‘internalisation’ or ‘indigenisation’. Unlike ‘major countries’, such as the United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia and Germany, that had a strong influence on the modernisation of the formal education system in Japan after the Meiji Restoration, Scandinavian influence was less visible, especially in national education policy making. However, there is evidence that the idea and practice of popular education in Scandinavian countries attracted many Japanese from an early stage. These were politicians, religious leaders, teachers, researchers and students. In this chapter, I would like to shed light on key people who were attracted by Scandinavian popular education as an alternative to existing institutionalised education in Japan, borrowed the idea and tried to implement it on Japanese soil in various ways. By doing so, I would like to invite international readers to be more aware of the crossnational or crosscultural nature of popular education supported by the citizens at a grassroots level.

My own encounter with Scandinavian education goes back to the early 1980s when I started to study comparative education and read Ellen Key’s *Century of the Child* in a Japanese translation. At that time my major field of research was the U.S.S.R., and it was interesting for me to know that Soviet education policy makers in the 1920s were gathering information on innovative education from around the world and studying the work of Ellen Key as well. I also participated in a study circle of Swedish language organised by the comparative research specialist in Nordic countries, Professor Iwao Matsuzaki at the School of Education of the University of Tokyo. But I had to wait until 1994, when I was working as a specialist at the Overseas Research Section at the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, to be dispatched

to Stockholm to undertake research on lifelong learning policy and practice in Sweden. Since then, I have been attracted by the wide opportunities for lifelong learning in Sweden as well as its culture and the people involved. I also became interested in Nordic cooperation in the field of education and started to observe how it would influence the process of globalisation and Europeanisation in the field of education. I have been following the development of these points and wrote papers and articles in Japanese, trying to attract the attention of policy makers and government workers responsible for lifelong learning (Sawano, 1995; 2000; 2007a; 2010). Comparative research on the effect of lifelong learning between Sweden and Japan is another theme of my recent research (Sawano, 2008).

This chapter is written making use of the literature and materials that I gathered for my previous research. It begins by looking back at the influence of the ‘Scandinavian model’ in Japanese education and lifelong learning, starting from the nineteenth century until the end of twentieth century, divided into three historical phases. Secondly, I describe the new interest in Nordic education and lifelong learning, which has emerged in Japan in the twenty-first century. Thirdly, I make a brief review of the history of nonformal education in Japan, called ‘social education’, which was developed through a top-down approach by the government. Finally, I describe how the Nordic model of education and lifelong learning, which was on the side of the establishment, came to be shared by Japanese secular lay people in charge of nonformal education.

## **Influence of the ‘Scandinavian model’ in Japanese education and lifelong learning**

According to Nobuhiko Yoshitake (2003), the development of relations between Japan and Scandinavian countries can be classified into five phases, from around the seventeenth century to the present. The first phase starts from the seventeenth century and lasts till the end of the Second World War in 1945, when Japan encountered Scandinavian people and culture and developed international relations with Scandinavian countries, but these broke up because of Japan’s military affairs in the Second World War. The second phase starts from the late 1940s until the 1950s, when international relations between Japan and the Scandinavian countries recovered, and Japanese people increased their admiration for these countries. The third phase is from the 1960s until the early 1970s,

when Scandinavian countries were considered as models of welfare society during the high growth period of the Japanese economy. The fourth phase is from the late 1970s until the end of the 1980s, when a negative campaign against the Scandinavian model of welfare system and peace policy emerged from the Japanese government, which had always been criticised by advocates of the Scandinavian model. The fifth phase starts from the late 1980s and continues today, and can be characterised as a stage of reappraisal of the Scandinavian model and progress in practical cooperation among researchers, administrators, politicians and civil organisations.

This historical classification will be useful in explaining the influence of the Scandinavian model and exchanges of people working in the field of education, both formal and nonformal, although the fourth period, characterised by the negative campaign against the Scandinavian model, did not take place in the field of education. Therefore, the third phase of looking towards Scandinavia as a model country of education and lifelong learning still continues and is even enhanced.

A utopian image of Scandinavian society had already been formed in the first period – the phase of crosscultural attraction. The Tokugawa feudal government implemented policies to isolate the nation and to break off all contact with foreign countries from the middle of the seventeenth century until the end of the nineteenth century, except for the port of Nagasaki. It was after the Tokugawa feudal government opened up the country, under pressure from the American Commodore Matthew Perry in 1854, that the real exchange of Scandinavian people and Japanese people started with visits to each other's countries (Yoshitake, 2003).

After the Meiji Restoration in 1867, the imperial government sent a delegation, headed by the Minister of Right, Tomomi Iwakura, to the west to undertake preliminary negotiations to revise unfair bilateral treaties and to make an on-site inspection, which was known as the 'Iwakura Mission'. During their one year and nine months' study tour, from 1871 till 1873, the Iwakura Mission visited not only major countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia and Italy, but also small countries, including Denmark and Sweden (Edström, 2002/1998).

From the end of the Edo and Meiji periods, until 1899, both the Tokugawa and Meiji governments and private companies hired a number of foreign experts to give advice and assist in the modernisation

of Japan. Most of them came from the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States and France, but there were also Scandinavian nationals. With the expansion of cultural and interpersonal exchanges, the philosophy and ideas of education from Scandinavian countries were introduced to Japan, as well as specific methods of instruction such as Swedish gymnastics which was recommended in the Japanese national curriculum and implemented in schools from 1914 until the end of the Second World War in 1945 (Yorizumi, 1991).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, encounters with Swedish educational ideas increased. In 1906, an abridged Japanese translation of Ellen Key's *The Century of the Child* was made by a Germanist and pedagogue Jintaro Ohmura. Key's work inspired many Japanese academics, especially those in the field of education.

But Japanese people became more interested in Denmark for its agriculture and folk high schools. In October 1911, an influential Japanese author and a Christian evangelist Kanzou Uchimura gave a lecture on 'A story of Denmark – a story of a country which saved a country with religion and trees' in a lecture on the bible in Tokyo. It was a story about an army engineer officer Enrico Dargus and his son Frederik, who discovered a method of tree plantation in the wasteland of the Schlesvig and Holstein regions after defeat in the war with Prussia and Austria in 1864. They succeeded in creating a new field for agriculture and contributed to rebuilding the country peacefully. The lecture was published as a book in 1913. Uchimura himself had never been to Denmark, but the story gave Japanese people a strong utopian image of a green and peaceful country (Yoshitake, 2003, pp. 35–43).

However, when it comes to education practice, the thoughts of Grundtvig and the philosophy of *Folkehøjskole* were connected to ultranationalism and Shintoism by the agricultural fundamentalists called 'Nohonshugisha', linked with the imperial system. One of Uchimura's students, Takeshi Fujii, established the Yamagata Kenritsu Jichi Koushujo [Yamagata Autonomy Training School] in Yamagata-ken in 1915, which was modelled on the Danish folk high school. Kanji Kato, who studied agriculture in Denmark in 1912 and visited folk high schools in Roskilde and Askov, was appointed as the first headmaster of this school. In 1927, Kato established Nippon Kokumin Koto Gakko (Japan Folk High School) at Tomobe, Ibaraki, as a private school. But the curriculum was quite different from the Danish one, as it pursued the spirit of nationalistic education while teaching agricultural and general

subjects. Nippon Nomin Fukuin Gakko (Japan Farmer's Evangelical School) established by Motojiro Sugiyama in 1927, seemed to be the only justifiable successor of the Danish folk high school, both in its form and spirit (Shimizu, 1996, pp. 315–314).

In 1929, Kounou Gakuen was established in Kuzura, Shizuoka-ken, as a school for the teaching of agriculture, based on Christianity, according to the will of a businessman Torazou Watase, who was a classmate of Kanzou Uchimura and Inazou Nitobe at Sapporo Agricultural College. Uchimura and Nitobe supported the establishment of the school. A leader of social education for youth, Hiroto Hirabayashi, who visited Denmark and stayed at Vallekilde Folk High School and Askov Folk High School, became the first head master of Kounou Gakuen. In 1933 the school changed the name to Kuzura Kokumin Koutou Gakkou (Kuzura Folk High School). As it modelled the Danish folk high school, young people lived together and learned theory and practice of agriculture closely related to farmers' real lives. But in 1942, with the development of the Asia-Pacific War, it was forced to change the name to Noudou Juku (Agricultural Art School) and to implement nationalistic education. In 1943 the school was virtually closed (Uno, 2002).

Another student of Uchimura's lecture course, Shigeyoshi Matsumae, who was working at that time as an engineering officer at the Ministry of Communications, actually visited Denmark for two months in 1934 while he was dispatched to Germany to study. He later wrote:

*Denmark is a country which accomplished a surprising achievement in which the influence of the idea of Grundtvig that is his life view, historical view and world view as well as his practice prevailed in national education and promotion of agriculture. The influence was much greater than I had been imagining through lecture and books of Mr. Kanzou Uchimura.' (Matsumae, 1980, pp. 98–100)*

In 1936, he established a private nonformal education institute named 'Bouseigakujuku' in a suburb of Tokyo. The institute was modelled on the Danish folk high school and emphasised the importance of dialogue, aimed at a nurturing way of looking at things and thinking, training the body and giving passion and fulfillment for life. They mainly undertook research on the bible and discussed the future of Japan and the world. After the Second World War, in 1946, Matsumae established a private university, Tokai University, based on Bouseigakujuku (Matsumae, 1986).

After the defeat in the Second World War in 1945, both formal and nonformal education in Japan went through complete reform to democratise Japan under the military occupation of the Allied Powers, in effect under the United States. The occupation lasted until 1952, when the San Francisco Peace Treaty came into force, and the recovery of Japan's sovereignty was verified by 49 countries. Since then, international relations with Scandinavian countries have improved again. In 1947, the edition of the 'Kokugo [National Language]' textbook for sixth grade pupils of elementary schools included the story of 'Green Field', which was a summary of Uchimura's 'A Story of Denmark'.

*People who were depressed by the defeat in war recovered hope and made a genuine research, acted with patience, collaborated with passion, and thus made the barren to a green field, revitalised the motherland. Finally it has become a peaceful state of this day*  
(Monbusho, 1947 [translation from Japanese by Sawano]).

Children who read the text in the postwar reconstruction period must have been encouraged and attracted by this peaceful image, which applied to Sweden as well.

As Japan entered into a period of rapid economic growth, interest in the welfare system of Sweden and other Scandinavian countries grew. Politicians and researchers started to make study visits to Scandinavian countries to learn about social policies and practices. In terms of policy borrowing, it moved on to the second phase of influencing decision making on education. The Japan Institute of Scandinavian Studies (JISS) was established in 1967, with Shigeyoshi Matsumae being the first President. The first Chairperson of the Board was the House of Representative's member from the Liberal Democratic Party, Masayoshi Ohira, who became Prime Minister of Japan from 1978 to 1980. Since then, JISS contributed in disseminating information on social policies, especially about Sweden, including education and lifelong learning policies, through its regular lecture courses and publications (JISS, 1981).

One of the active members of JISS, Hiroshi Nakajima, Professor of Comparative and International Education at Waseda University, wrote a number of papers and books on education in Sweden and other Nordic countries. For example, in 1970 he published a report on 'lifelong education in Sweden' from JISS. Later on he introduced the 'recurrent education' system in Sweden and the theory of the 'learning society' by

Torsten Husen, which were made use of by Japanese education policy makers who were trying to envisage the concept of lifelong learning as a means of major educational reform (Nakajima, 1994).

In 1979, at the International Year of the Child, Makoto Onodera, who was the army attaché to the Japanese Embassy in Sweden during the Second World War, and his wife Yuriko Onodera published a new Japanese translation of Ellen Key's *Century of the Child*, which became a bestseller. It has enhanced the image of free and relaxed education in Sweden with a child-centred approach, placing importance on the personality of every child (Key, 1900=1979).

Other key people who conducted thorough research on education in Scandinavian countries in this period were Iwao Matsuzaki, who became professor at the University of Tokyo, and Masaharu Sasaki, professor at Hiroshima University. 'Hokuou Kyoikushi [History of Nordic Education]', published in a series of World Education History in 1976, was written by these people and is still the only structured book of the history of education in Nordic countries written in Japanese (Umene, 1976). Matsuzaki also wrote a number of papers about the basic education curriculum and higher education reform in Sweden, while Sasaki investigated Grundtvig and the development of folk high schools in Denmark and other Scandinavian countries. Since they were trained as educational historians, their research was based on literature (Sasaki, 1999).

Budding researchers such as Keiko Sampei and Masaaki Nimonji appeared during this period. Sampei introduced the ideas of municipal adult education (KOMVUX) and the adult education support system operating in Sweden. She studied at graduate school in Uppsala University, settled and raised a family in Sweden and has taken on an important role in passing on a realistic picture of education and lifelong learning from Sweden to Japan (Sampei, 1993). Nimonji, who became professor at Osaka Kyouiku University, carried out intense research on special needs education and the welfare system for people with disabilities in Sweden and other Nordic countries (Nimonji and Itoh, 2002).

Other topics which interested Japanese educators during this period were systems of early childhood education and care, education about sex and health and home economics education in schools. It was also in this period when children's literature, written by such authors as Astrid Lindgren, Tove Janson and Alf Prøysen was translated into Japanese.

Together with Nils Holgerssons by Selma Lagerlof, and other characters from Hans Christian Anderson's stories, already well-known in Japan, some were made into cartoon films in Japan, which became very popular on TV.

From the end of the 1980s, as globalisation proceeded and Japanese currency became stronger, an increasing number of private citizens started to visit Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland. Thus comes the third phase of implementation of the Scandinavian education model in Japan.

A key person in the 1990s, who widely disseminated the ideas of Grundtvig and Danish folk high schools among general citizens, was Mitsuru Shimizu, a citizen activist on ecological agriculture who lived in the city of Munakata, Fukuoka-ken, located in Kyushu, in the southern region of Japan. In 1993 he edited and published a book on 'Sei no tameno gakkou – Denmark de umareta free school "Folkehojskole"' [School for life – world of 'Folkehojskole', free school born in Denmark], which became very popular and he therefore published a new edition in 1996. Together with a forward by the Danish scholar Ove Korsgaard, the book describes everyday life and the organisation of teaching and learning in modern Danish folk high schools, and explains about the life and ideas of Grundtvig and Kristen Kold as well as how the movement of establishing folk high schools spread around the world. It had useful information for those who were planning to study in Denmark and notes from their experiences written by Japanese students who had actually studied in folk high schools in Denmark. It also had an English chapter on 'Folkehojskole and Japan: how the movement was introduced to Japan' written by Shimizu himself. Shimizu also established the 'Grundtvig Society Japan' in 1994 to organise popular education seminars and promote a movement to establish folk high schools in Japan. Setana Folkehojskole, established in Hokkaido in 1989, where students engaged in dairy husbandry in the daytime and cultural activities in the evening, Heki Folkehojskole, established in Yamaguchi-ken in 1996 as a study circle with a library for disabled children, and Kaze No Kyoshitsu (Wind Class), established in Kagoshima-ken as a study circle of agriculture, became members of the association (Shimizu, 1996).

During this period, more Japanese students at upper secondary school and university who were brought up with the fantastic world of Nordic children's literature and were attracted by the relaxed and safe image

of Nordic education and society went to study in Nordic countries and became fluent in the languages. Retired people and housewives also went to study for several months at folk high schools in Denmark and Sweden. There was a boom in publishing books on personal experiences of education in Nordic countries written by parents or students themselves (Kawamoto, 2002; Miyoshi, 2001; Shibata, 2003). Some of these books developed from personal blogs on the internet (Miyoshi, 2001; Suzuki, 2010). Those who became fluent in Nordic languages continued their studies at graduate schools and wrote MA and PhD dissertations on Nordic education and lifelong learning. As they can read, write and speak the languages, their research approaches are obviously different from the previous generation, with their fieldwork making their findings more realistic.

Japanese researchers' and practitioners' interest in Nordic countries became deeper and wider to include education and learning for gender equality, entrepreneurship, inclusive education and strategies to meet the needs of a knowledge based economy and society.

### **New interest in the ‘Scandinavian model’ in the new millennium**

At the turn of the century, Japanese economists and politicians were also attracted by the Nordic model of education and lifelong learning, as they were successful in achieving both ‘equity’ and ‘quality’, which seemed to be contributing to a sustainable development of economy and society. Different types of crosscultural attraction towards Nordic countries emerged in Japan.

The emphasis of research into Nordic countries changed dramatically after the high scores achieved by Finnish children in OECD PISA. Japanese media, politicians of various parties, national and local education administrators, teachers' unions, school teachers and other education specialists rushed to Finland to observe the situation of school education there. Because of the language barrier, there were very few books published in Japanese on Finnish education until then. After 2005 there was a sudden boom of publications on the successful school education practice and high quality of teachers in Finland. The attraction towards Sweden and Denmark seemed to fade away in the shadow of Finland.

But some economists drew attention to the Swedish lifelong learning system in order to seek strategies to recover the Japanese economy

from a long lasting recession. They were Masazumi Itoh and Naohiko Jinno. While Itoh focused on the recurrent education system and higher vocational education in Sweden (Itoh, 2007), Jinno looked at the whole lifelong learning system starting from preschool through to adult education in local communities, folk high schools and study circle movements. Jinno saw Sweden as a ‘learning society’ where never-ending ‘learning’ was available to everyone, anytime, anywhere and free of charge. He thought that it was this kind of learning society that supported the development of a knowledge society, and that both school education and adult education should be systematised so that people could go back and forth between education and work. He placed importance on the role of study circles in Sweden as they were based on people’s authentic motivation to learn, which functioned as the engine to drive towards the knowledge society (Jinno, 2007).

In 2011, Miyuki Ohta published a book ‘*Shougaigakushu shakai no politics – Sweden seijin kyouiku no rekishi to kouzou* [Politics of a lifelong learning society – history and structure of adult education in Sweden]’, based on her doctoral dissertation which she submitted to the Graduate School of Sociology at Hitotsubashi University in 2007. It was the first publication in Japan which compiled the overall history of adult education in Sweden from the middle ages and described the current situation of popular education based on literature review and fieldwork. The aim of this book is to see Swedish popular education as a practice of radical adult education, which is aimed at the transformation of society and makes an analysis of the multilayered development and the social function it has accomplished. Thus Ohta tries to shed light on the structure of the learning society developed in Sweden. By investigating the momentum for the learners’ ‘conscientisation’, she tries to illustrate an alternative image of a learning society, which the existing theories on the learning society could not achieve (Ohta, 2011, p. 42). Ohta thinks her research interest is close to that of Staffan Larsson and Henrik Nordvall (*ibid.*, p. 40).

According to Ohta, existing theories on the learning society are constructed through a search for the possibility of social advancement, and popular adult education tended to be excluded from the discourse of the learning society. Therefore, she proposes that the learning society should be defined by the balance between formal adult education provided by public authorities and popular adult education (*ibid.*, p. 337), and makes an analysis of the history of Swedish adult education from this

point of view. This research framework makes it difficult to focus on the important purpose of Swedish adult education – to reduce the learning divide caused by age, gender, family background and other reasons, as well as to facilitate a dialogue between civil society and government, which I myself place more importance on. However, this huge work, with careful research, successfully reveals the different approaches of popular adult education in Denmark and Sweden through providing some interesting evidence. The next task for the young scholar will be to translate her work into English or Swedish by herself.

## **Influence of the ‘Scandinavian model’ in Japanese social education**

Turning the focus now to the theme of this book, I would like to discuss power, democracy and nonformal education in Japan, together with its relationship with Scandinavian popular education.

Nonformal education was first named ‘Tsuuzoku kyoiku (popular education)’ in the Meiji period and its aim was the indoctrination of Japanese nationals. In 1886, the Monbusho (the Education Ministry of Japan) regulated the administration of popular education as a function of their Bureau of Academic Affairs. In 1921, the ministry renamed it ‘Shakai kyouiku (social education)’ to include the responsibility for libraries, museums, youth organisations, women’s organisations, adult education, special needs education and approval of popular publications. As Japan built up its militarism to go into the two World Wars, social education was used by the militaristic government to strengthen ultranationalism among Japanese citizens, which affected the practice of Danish-type folk high schools in Japan as mentioned above (Hiruta, 2005, pp. 39–40).

After the Second World War, new education laws, such as the Fundamental Law of Education and the Social Education Law, were enacted in accordance with the new constitution under the occupation of the United States. Compared to the old 1890 constitution, one of the radical shifts of the 1947 constitution was to stipulate the Japanese people as ‘Kokumin (national)’ rather than ‘Shumin (subject)’. The first sentence of the preamble of the 1947 Fundamental Law of Education said:‘

*Having established the Constitution of Japan, we have shown our resolution to contribute to the world and welfare of humanity by*

*building a democratic and cultural state. The realization of this idea shall depend fundamentally on the power of education. We shall esteem individual dignity and endeavor to bring up the people who love truth and peace, while education aimed at the creation of culture, general and rich in individuality, shall be spread far and wide.*

The aim of education was stipulated as follows:

*Education shall aim at the full development of personality, striving for the rearing of the people, sound in mind and body, who shall love truth and justice, esteem individual value, respect labor and have a deep sense of responsibility, and be imbued with the independent spirit, as builders of peaceful state and society. (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet)*

This aim was in effect for both school and social education.

In 1949, the Social Education Law was enacted, which defined 'social education' as organised educational activities for children, young people and adults, including sports and recreation, but excluding those organised in school education in accordance with the school curriculum. It has become the responsibility of both national and local governments to promote democratisation and empowerment of the people, especially women who did not have the right to participate in policy until then. Public support in terms of budget, staff and places of learning (for example local community learning centres (Kominkan), libraries, museums and other social education facilities) were made in accordance with this law, but it excluded education in relation to political parties or religious organisations (Hiruta, 2005, p. 41). The top-down approach of social education, which sometimes looked down on the people as immature, might have been a negative legacy from the prewar tradition of nationalistic education. Although participatory learning and independent study circle activities were much encouraged as methods of learning in social education practice, a political scientist later criticised the idea that social education in Japan assumed that the people were immature citizens who should be educated and nurtured from above. It led to a discussion that, since Japan had become a country of popular sovereignty, which presupposed the existence of mature citizens, there was no need for social education in Japan any more (Matsushita, 1986).

At the grassroots in the 1950s and 1960s, a learning culture

movement, which aimed at liberty of the oppressed by creating popular culture, emerged in Japan. For example, in 1963, the board of education of Hirakata city in Osaka-fu made Hirakata Thesis in which it claimed that, 'Social education is an educational sphere of mass movement'. However, as the mass movement at that period was often related to left wing political parties, it was criticised by the conservative academics and administrators as too narrow a definition of social education. In order to carefully avoid supporting such politically oriented social education activities, local social education policy was changed to support independent study circle activities run by the citizens, which were not related to any organisations (Miyazaki, 2005).

The introduction of the concept of 'lifelong learning' gave rise to confusion among local administrators and practitioners of social education in the definition and concept. Some people thought lifelong learning was equivalent to social education. Since the concept of lifelong learning itself was introduced from the top down in the early 1970s by the Japanese government with the influence of UNESCO's Faure Report, the notion of 'learning to be', the idea of learning for self-realisation and personal development was emphasised, rather than learning related to work or civil society. With an aging population and increasing leisure time among the elderly and housewives, learning related to hobbies, liberal arts, health and sports became popular in the field of social education. As Japanese people's income increased with the development of the economy, more people started to invest in their own learning, often provided by private nonformal education institutions. The direction of lifelong learning policy implemented in the late 1980s was to encourage private industry to participate in lifelong learning provision and to promote a user-pay principle in policy (Sawano, 2007b).

Moreover, Japan's bubble economy ended precisely when concrete measures to promote lifelong learning were being planned and executed. The next two decades of severe recessionary struggles starting from around 1990 are now called 'the two lost decades'. The Japanese government had to undertake a major structural reform of its administrative and financial systems in order to recover from the stagnation. The government's reforms adopted a neoliberal approach that placed importance on competition, decentralisation and the deregulation and privatisation of public services. Thus, the budget for public social education was severely cut back (*ibid.*).

In parallel with this process, an increasing number of Japanese citizens

have been empowered to become active to organise various learning opportunities in local communities. Civil society in Japan was even more empowered after the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995, when people realised the importance of citizens' participation in voluntary community-building, rather than relying too much on the power of national and local governments. These active citizens are now called 'Atarashii Koukyou [new public]' in Japan, and valued because they are expected to have the potential to compensate for the downsizing of public administration and budget cuts. Folk high schools and study circles reemerged in Japan in this context. Taking the status of nonprofit making organisations, they are independent from the power of state as well as public support, and therefore free to undertake a transformative role in society. It is in this process that the Scandinavian model of education and lifelong learning, which was on the side of establishment, came to be shared by secular lay people in Japan, who launched their own nonformal learning inspired by the Scandinavian model.

One such initiative is 'Hojskole Sapporo', established in 2008 by Reiko Ogoshi in the city of Sapporo, Hokkaido in collaboration with Professor Kazuhiko Kawasaki of Hokkaido Tokai University, who specialises in the Nordic labour and industry system as well as entrepreneurship education in Finland. He also translated the book written by Ove Korsgaard on the history of Danish adult education 'Kampen om lyset: dansk voksenoplysning gennem 500 år' (Korsgaard, 1997/1999). Ogoshi herself is a lifelong learner, who entered Hokkaido Tokai University as an adult student at the age of 58. When she proceeded to graduate school, she made study visits to Sweden and Denmark, and participated in a course in a Danish folk high school in Helnaes. After she came back to Japan, she decided to establish an independent learning organisation which inherited the spirit of Grundtvig and Matsumae – the folk high school-inspired founder of Tokai University. The idea was that it would be more and more important for every citizen in Japan to continue learning to adapt to ageing and a changing society, and to have the opportunity to interact with people of different generations. However, there is a limit to self-learning. By taking part in a wider range of learning together with other people, learners can contribute to vitalising the local community by adapting themselves to the changing reality of society, and by sharing knowledge and the ability to select information (Ogose, 2011).

Another example is 'Akaigawa-juku International Free School'

established in 2009 in Akaigawa village, Hokkaido, by a young couple in their 30s, Akiko and Masashi Nakamura. Both of them had been teachers in a public school and felt a sense of crisis in Japanese public education and special needs education. Akiko Nakamura had studied in Canada, and wrote her Master's thesis on Grundtvig and folk high schools. She was also interested in education for international understanding. Once they went to Setana Folkehojskole, located in the rural area of Hokkaido, and met the headmaster Masato Kawamura. Inspired by the educational philosophy of Kawamura and the practice of Folkehojskole, which has no examinations or qualifications, Masashi decided to work at Setana as a staff member. From this experience, he established Akaigawajuku and became the headmaster. The aim of the school is to let the students search for a way of living through communication and dialogue with various people and various activities rich in character; art, study, sports and work experience (Kusunoki, 2010). Since it is a private institution, without any accreditation by the public authority, it might face some difficulties in getting finance, as was the case with other Folkehojskoles in rural areas which had to be closed.

## Conclusion

The Scandinavian model of popular education never directly influenced the decision-making of education policy in Japan. In the first half of the twentieth century, it had long been seen as an ideal style of education and learning by Christian evangelists and educators in Japan, some of whom tried to implement the idea into formal school education practice, but failed because of the nationalistic character of education closely connected with Shintoism and militarism during that period. After the Second World War, Japanese education as a whole was democratised. However, the bad memories of prewar education prevented any encouragement of the development of nonformal education related to popular mass movements, often connected to political movements. It was only at the end of the twentieth century, when the Japanese soil was at last cultivated, that it was possible to implement the Scandinavian model of popular education from the bottom up, by the citizens themselves.

The importance of such nonformal education, organised at grass roots level to enhance solidarity and the cohesion of local communities, self-fulfillment and wellbeing of the people, came under the spot light again, especially after the East Japan Earthquake on 11 March 2011. How to

create a good balance between public support and autonomy of civil society, and also between economic demands and the societal demand for nonformal education is still a big issue in Japan. We still need to learn from progressive efforts made by the Scandinavian people and popular education in this respect.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, popular education could be more crossnational or crosscultural, because of its nonformality and flexibility, especially when citizens can act on their own initiative, free from any political or ideological suppression. Then it can gain benefit from globalisation or transnationalisation, which facilitates educational borrowing in more positive and refined ways.

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# Reflections on popular education in the UK and Sweden: Changes in the state, public sphere and civil society

*Jim Crowther*

## Introduction

My first encounter with Swedish popular education was at the inaugural conference of the international Popular Education Network (PEN)<sup>1</sup> at the University of Edinburgh in 1999. Whilst it was a stimulating event there was also considerable disagreement over the meaning and purpose of popular education (see the conference review, Von Kotze and Cooper, 2000). As I recall, some of the Swedish participants believed there was too great an emphasis on the politics rather than the educational dimension of popular education. Perhaps I should not have been surprised. Popular education is a contested concept and embraces a range of legitimate meanings so it is important to be clear what it stands for – as well as what it stands against. I return to this after the introduction.

The central problem addressed in this chapter is the relationship between popular education and the state; to what extent are the two compatible? What can be done to maximise the potential for popular education to contribute to a socially just and democratic society? How is this influenced by changes in the relationship between the state, the public sphere and civil society? These concerns are relevant to a

number of chapters in this book and, in terms of a wider audience, these questions are also relevant to popular educators from Latin America. The success of ideologically progressive socialist governments on the South American continent has started debates about popular education and its use of state resources. This is sometimes referred to as having one foot inside and one foot outside the state (see Kane, 2012).

The argument of this chapter starts with Philip Bobbitt's (2002) claim that the nation-state is being replaced by the emergence of a market-state – a persuasive point of view – which has important consequences for democracy and education for social justice. I also draw on Nancy Fraser's argument that social justice requires a commitment to 'participatory parity' in order for redistribution and recognition claims to be met. This leads to two broad agendas, which are outlined below.

Firstly, popular educators need to challenge the market interests undermining the state – in effect to defend the provision of state welfare which is being transformed by austerity measures advocated by political parties which largely differ in their response to the current economic crisis primarily over the scale and speed of cuts in public expenditure but not their implementation. Despite its shortcomings, the nation-state is a better ally for popular education than the market-state (see Shaw and Martin, 2000) and the Swedish experience has a great deal to offer in demonstrating this. Reinvigorating the public sphere, to keep open alternative options to the language and values of the market, will be critical to achieving this aim.

Secondly, social justice has to be built on progressive alliances in civil society and across national boundaries. These need to come from the bottom up, in communities of endurance and struggle – the account by Henrik Nordvall, (chapter 7) of the links made between the Workers' Educational Association and the World Social Forum is an example of this in the Swedish context. The proliferation of networks 'from below' enables the articulation of new ways of defining the problems people face. Articulation needs to occur in the dual sense of making explicit common interests which can be the basis for political action, as well as making connections with alternative cultural values and priorities, to challenge neoliberal globalisation that talks about one value only – value for money.

The above arguments are not particularly new but they are worth restating. In doing this, the main point of reference for this chapter is trends in the UK but I also draw on material from the anthology where

the arguments and themes resonate with this context. At the end of the day, it is for the reader to judge their relevance. Before this I want to be more precise about how popular education is defined in this account.

## **Popular education: in and against the state**

Popular education is sometimes contrasted with state funded educational provision; a rough characterisation might be that ‘the popular’ refers to education based on the interests of the oppressed whereas state education is shaped by priorities and policies of the state. However, this would exclude a good deal of popular education in Sweden – although as Kerstin Rydbeck (chapter 4) shows, women’s informal popular education took place in organisations excluded from state recognition. Nevertheless, the Swedish experience of state funded study circles and folk high schools, which operate quite autonomously from the state, makes the simple distinction above problematic.

In the UK, the argument for developing radical educational purpose with state funding was referred to as both ‘in and against’ the state. This type of strategic approach was advanced in the early 1980s (see LEWRG, 1979), and drew on Gramscian and feminist arguments that the state was not merely a set of institutions of government, security, law and order but also fostered capitalist, patriarchal and racist social relations that contributed to maintaining an unequal society. This weakens the capacity of subaltern groups to achieve solidarity, organisation and collective resistance. The individualising of social problems is a classic example, where poor communities are treated as an aggregate of deficit individuals unable to benefit from the opportunities they have. Poor people, from this perspective, lack motivation, self-discipline, industrious habits, family controls and so on. These personal characteristics are the source of their problems rather than interlocking structures of inequality, which in one way or another, determine their predicament in the first place.

The in and against position claims that the state is a problem for people as well as a provider of resources to benefit them. It can redistribute wealth and resources, or legislate against discrimination and oppression, but in actual fact it often supports the powerful against the vulnerable. Radical educators, health workers, teachers and those engaged in community development can exploit their relative autonomy to act against the repressive nature of state practices.

It was the above position which informed the following PEN definition:

*Popular education is understood to be popular, as distinct from merely populist, in the sense that it is:*

- *rooted in the real interests and struggles of ordinary people*
- *overtly political and critical of the status quo*
- *committed to progressive social and political change.*

*Popular education is based on a clear analysis of the nature of inequality, exploitation and oppression, and is informed by an equally clear political purpose. This has nothing to do with helping the 'disadvantaged' or the management of poverty; it has everything to do with the struggle for a more just and egalitarian social order.*

PEN's radical definition seeks to avoid education becoming naively incorporated into the ideological underpinnings of state policy by being clear and uncompromising about its purpose. The significance of this is underlined by the way in which Paulo Freire's work is often depoliticised – for example, the development of participatory techniques is lifted out of the politics and philosophy they derive from (see Gibson, 1994).

The PEN version of popular education may be irrelevant to some study circle and folk high school activities. Yet, as Eva Andersson and Ann-Marie Laginder (chapter 6) point out, whilst study circles demonstrate high levels of participation in Sweden, the motives of those involved are often blurred and are neither simply personal nor collective in focus. The degree to which this blurring occurs varies across subject areas and the links between study circle members and associations. Also, as Staffan Larsson (chapter 5) demonstrates, vocational interests, rather than the concerns of social movements, often motivate participants in folk high schools. There is nothing wrong with these educational activities but they have different purposes to those defined as popular education in this chapter.

So what are the prospects for popular education in the context of the state today? Since the original formulation of the in and against argument in the 1980s we have seen significant changes in the relationship between state, civil society and public spheres, which have important consequences for educational engagement.

## **From nation-state to market-state**

Bobbitt (2002), a constitutional theorist in the United States, argues that growing threats such as terrorism undermine the legitimacy of the nation-state and limits its ability to provide its citizens with security within territorial borders. There are a number of parts of the argument to highlight. The national character of nation-states evokes a particular ethnic identity, which then begins to internally isolate groups and communities which it then excludes. This marking out of people alienates a substantial minority of the population who may then become more predisposed towards crime, terrorism or riots. Changes to welfare provision compound this problem. Global financial markets limit the welfare capacity of governments when they undermine the confidence of the markets. Digital technologies ensure that reactions to national policies occur speedily so that upsetting the markets has swift and punitive consequences.

As welfare provision is undermined, the ability of the nation-state to legitimate its role to provide security is weakened. Instead, welfare is claimed to undermine human dignity and the capacity of people to take care of themselves and their families. What was once understood as a good thing, to support people in need, is reframed as sapping individual morale and a drain on hard working taxpayers. Finally, the nation-state promises to protect the cultural integrity of the nation, however, migration makes it difficult to generate equal treatment of different cultural communities that are incommensurate with each other. This motivates a tendency to assimilation premised on a dominant cultural form that confines minority groups to a second-class status (see Osman's chapter 7 for an account of migrant associations in Sweden and the 'normalising' practices of popular education to eradicate 'backward cultures'). The claim of the state to treat individuals equally and fairly is, therefore, further undermined, which is likely to result in problems of crime and public disorder. Together these developments lead towards the disintegration of the nation-state.

The market-state also offers to better people's lives, but only supports a minimal role for welfare and redistribution. Instead, it claims to provide opportunities for people to look after themselves. Creating a new world of choices and protecting the rights of individuals to choose, rather than the provision of collective welfare, is in line with the rationale of the market-state. According to this argument, the market-

state is indifferent to social inequalities in the sense that its priority is economic competition. Bobbitt suggests there are three key paradoxes that derive from this development: 1) the state requires more centralised authority yet governments are inevitably weaker because the scope of their undertakings are devolved to various agencies and corporations; 2) governments seek more active citizenship in terms of public participation but it counts for less; 3) some methods for promoting general forms of security increase (e.g., surveillance to counteract terrorism) whilst the welfare state is diminished.

Although Bobbitt claims the market-state is indifferent to inequality, because it is primarily interested in opportunity, the reality is that structures of class, 'race' and gender matter to the distribution and take-up of opportunities. The lack of a 'level playing field' simply means the powerful and privileged are better able to protect their interests, particularly as the state retreats from attempts to deal with redistribution and recognition claims.

### **Social justice as participatory parity**

The American political philosopher Fraser (2005) argues that, in the context of globalisation, social justice can no longer be met by the nation-state. She (2012) suggests that starting from situations of injustice is a powerful and productive way to make an abstract idea concrete. There are two broad types of social injustice: those which occur through distribution (claims which are made in relation to unequal access and control over material resources) and recognition (claims made in relation to respect and affirmation of cultural practices), which are brought together in terms of the single principle of *participatory parity* (claims for representation in the sense of actively participating in democratic practices). That is, if people are systematically excluded from framing rules and norms why should they abide by them? Moreover, can we really understand social injustice without hearing from those whom it affects?

Historically, social justice claims for redistribution were furthered by the labour movement but often in ways which reinforced an unequal status order (e.g., excluding women). There is a parallel trend in Sweden. In the folk high schools the demands of small farmers or a patriarchal labour movement advanced men's interests to the exclusion of women (see Larsson, chapter 5). The distinction between social injustice through

misrecognition or maldistribution is blurred as these categories overlap, influence and reinforce each other.

To challenge social injustice, new forms of solidarity need to be developed from the ground up. In the UK, John Grayson (2011) provides a good example which exemplifies Fraser's argument (although Grayson does not draw on her conceptual framing). His focus is the city of Sheffield, where the impact of deindustrialisation, globalisation and migration has transformed a once solid and confident working class community. The 'other' has often borne the brunt of such transformations. However, local community, religious and political groups are forging new alliances to create public spaces for migrants to tell their narratives of injustice and build collective action. In some respects, Grayson's account of educational and political intervention chimes well with Bernt Gustavsson's (chapter 3) historical and philosophical argument about the democratisation of *bildung*. Popular education in Sweden has had a social levelling impact on 'building' a search for meaning which is personal as well as informed by the goals of social movements – a process which, in the early history of the concept, was exclusive to a select elite. Today's context of globalisation and postcolonialism can involve an interaction with other cultures where a more humanistic and democratic version of *bildung* can be practised.

To strengthen claims for social justice, popular education should, as Fraser points out, '... examine the public sphere for biases that impede equal access to political voice ... by broadening the terms available for naming social problems and disputing their causes' (2012, p. 51).

## **Enhancing the public sphere**

The historian and public intellectual Tony Judt (2010) argues that (written in the wake of the economic crisis of 2008) if we cannot speak about things differently, we cannot think about things differently. Who speaks in the public sphere is, therefore, a critical issue. According to Tom Steele's (2007) historical overview of popular education in Europe, its growth was linked to the emergence of the proletarian public sphere where the voice, ideas and experience of subaltern groups began to be heard. Indeed, popular education is part of the public sphere. Similarly, today it has an important role in repairing the fabric of public discourse by opening up how problems are spoken about, framed and understood.

In Jurgen Habermas' account, the public sphere is 'a network for

communicating information and points of view; i.e. opinions expressing affirmative or negative attitudes . . . [which] are in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified *public* opinions' (1996, p. 350). Stephen Brookfield expresses it thus:

*In simple terms it is like an enormous outdoor café full of people talking about concerns they share in common or a chat room in which people log on to register and exchange their views about something* (2006, p. 231).

Nevertheless, registering and exchanging opinions is undermined by at least three interrelated trends which limit the functional capacity of the public sphere.

Firstly, the relationship between personal troubles and public issues has been transformed. Public issues are filled with private concerns but fail to condense into common causes for social betterment (Bauman, 1999). The 'art of translation' between the two is undermined as changing systems of control occur. Bauman argues that in the early phase of modernity people were held together by the panoptican – a metaphor for the process of public control where the few watched the many. But this has been transformed into more subtle forms of control (although the significance of systems of surveillance should not be underestimated). He refers to the synopticon, that is, the colonisation of public spaces with private spectacles so that the many are distracted from serious public issues by watching the few (1999, p. 71). Private life is put on show for public interest. The phenomenal growth of 'reality television' is a case in point, where personal angst and dilemmas turn into public events that absorb and attract audiences. In this process the public sphere falters as a context for giving shape to personal problems as public issues.

Secondly, Bauman argues that globalisation compounds the above problem because it separates power from political processes. Limited by what they can do, politicians depend more for electoral success on their projection of personal virtues rather than their capacity for political analysis and action. Political debates can easily be reduced to the whims and personal characteristics of politicians. One example of this, it seems to me, was the former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, who repeatedly justified his decision to invade Iraq in 2003 on the grounds of his sincerity. He believed that the Iraqi government possessed weapons of

mass destruction with the capacity to reach the UK in 40 minutes – it therefore did not matter if he was wrong, or the veracity of the evidence used to justify his position. What mattered was his sincere belief.

Thirdly, to add to the above argument, political debate is confined within a narrow ideological discourse about what type of change is legitimate. For example, the Eurozone economic crisis in 2012 is hotly debated by the ideological ‘right’ and ideological ‘left’ but primarily between two options; more austerity measures or more demand management of the economy. The goal of economic growth is beyond question and neither alternative addresses the issue of social justice. This discursive closing down of the problem and solution ignores the real anger, poverty and injustice experienced by vulnerable individuals and groups. Public demonstrations on the streets of Europe and the rise of formerly fringe political forces, for example in Greece, is indicative of new public spheres emerging which resonate with public fears and concerns. Without the voice of the oppressed becoming part of the debate, the opportunity for critical and creative responses to the crisis is limited to the binary alternatives of formal politics. Is it hardly surprising that the debates of political elites are far removed from the anger that animates the lives of everyday people (see Martin, 2003)?

In some respects the public sphere has been opened-up by online digital communications (Coleman and Blumler, 2009). Of course any account of the potential of virtual media to counteract the culture of the public sphere needs to keep in mind that entertainment and pornography are probably some of its main uses. Also, it takes more than 140 characters of twitter to further social change. Having said that, user-led social media which creates possibilities for two-way processes of information exchange, as well as the Internet and mobile phone technology, have accelerated the mobilisation of dissent, assisted in the organisation of collective action and enabled innovative political repertoires (Malone, 2012).

The central role of popular education in the public sphere today lies in its commitment to engage with the deep well of knowledge and experience of ordinary people – the victims rather than designers of the present day economic calamity. Their knowledge is essential for socially just solutions, but learning from the dispossessed is not an uncritical or uncomplicated process. Paulo Freire (1972) refers to the ‘horizontal violence’ that occurs amongst the powerless who are divided by competition for scarce resources. In these circumstances conflict and

antagonism, distrust and fear amongst marginalised groups are barriers to solidarity. There are examples from the Swedish experience that focus on this issue.

The reconciling of antagonistic relations is a theme explored in Berit Larsson's (chapter 9) account of 'practising democracy as an agonistic dialogue'. Her argument is based on the experience of a women's folk high school which creates a public sphere where all manner of social, cultural, religious, ethnic and sexual differences (amongst others) provide the context where provisional agreements and understanding are essential for learning together. The aim is to transform antagonism into agonism, i.e., the respectful process of understanding differences whilst finding a basis for a relationship between conflicting groups. This objective starts from the perspective that difference enriches life rather than being a problem to be diminished.

The role of popular education in the public sphere is also evident in how study circles have developed. These structures contribute towards the way in which groups and communities enhance their power and voice as well as providing a space for individuals to develop their personal interests (see chapter 6). Moreover, in the context of adult learning policy in Europe, Kjell Rubenson (chapter 2) makes a strong case that the Swedish model of popular education offers potential for improving participation rates across Europe. He discerns a shift in European policy focus away from a narrow instrumentalism towards concerns for democracy, citizenship and social cohesion, which provides a more hospitable environment to enlarge the public sphere. Whereas the market state in the UK is limiting possibilities, policy at a European level may assist with resourcing popular education for the public sphere. At the same time, the incorporation of organisations in civil society into a market logic is advanced by its changing relationship with the state.

## **Civil society**

Civil society refers to areas of free association outside the state and the economy. It is populated by voluntary associations, social movements, nongovernmental organisations and so on, which act in the intermediate space above the family and below the state. But it is necessary to recognise the interpenetration of state and civil society; as Antonio Gramsci argued the state is 'political society + civil society, in other words, hegemony protected by the armour of coercion' (1971, p. 263).

Increasingly, civil society is being shaped by market thinking and values promoted by changes in state practices. For example, ‘outcomes led’ funding means that payments to voluntary organisations are dependent on fulfilling targets set by the state as overseer and regulator. At the same time, the reduction in welfare is being filled by the growth of the private sector in education, health and other profitable areas where the voluntary sector has to compete.

The trends transforming civil society internally are also mirrored externally in ‘civil society’ on an international level. Nongovernmental organisations in this sphere are subject to similar processes of incorporation. This is what Choudry (2010) terms ‘NGOisation’, which involves social movement organisations becoming increasingly involved in the professionalisation and bureaucratisation of social change. By adopting a more pragmatic approach to social and environmental concerns, they often fragment and compartmentalise change issues rather than supporting systemic transformation.

Squeezed between the ‘rock’ of the market state and ‘the hard place’ of civil society the task of popular education is increasingly difficult and increasingly urgent. But there are opportunities. In some cases, progressive grassroots movements at a local level can drive change. An example of this is given by Crowther *et al.* (2012) in an article which documents a community campaign against the activities of a multinational fish farming operation in the northeast of Scotland. Popular education supported a (partially) successful campaign that started from objections to the impact of the farms on the natural beauty of the landscape and went on to question fundamental issues of land ownership through to the rights of communities to own and control the seabed.

Scaling up local grievances into national and international causes is important for shifting the balance of power, particularly when dealing with multinational companies. But scaling up requires alliances with transnational movements from below. Jim McCourt (2006) provides an inspiring story of women working in the microchip processing industry and their struggle for environmental and social justice in a deindustrialised area of Scotland. The microchip industry advertises itself as a safe and clean industry, but this is far from the reality. The success of the Phase 2 Campaign in Greenock in Scotland, to expose the carcinogens women employees were subjected to at work, gained leverage by acting at a UK and international level rather than just acting locally. International environmental and labour organisations enabled

solidarity between microchip workers in different countries to speak back to powerful multinationals.

As the state–civil society relationship is increasingly mediated by market principles, popular educators need to make strategic choices about what can be done. Giving up on the state should not be one of these choices. Instead, action to remake it by building alliances, developing solidarity and organisational capacity are required to ensure the voice and experience of silenced communities are heard and heeded. The determining factor in how the state deals with communities is the active strength of movements outside of the state. One of the lessons from the UK and Sweden is that the state can be a resource for popular education. At the same time, popular educators are involved in power relations and need to be reflexive about their own position and how this might assimilate subordinate voices and experiences. As Rogers (chapter 11) alludes to, the exporting of the Swedish model of folk high schools to countries such as Tanzania involved an implicit colonial project even if this was far removed from any explicit acknowledgement of this purpose.

### **Postscript: do-it-yourself (DIY) popular education**

The above arguments are premised on the need to transform the state, rather than to abandon it forever as a hopelessly compromised instrument of capitalism. However, some of the developments of popular education in the UK, particularly inspired by Marxist-anarchist perspectives, would reject this argument and claim that rather than waiting to transform state power we need to begin to organise to live differently now (Holloway, 2010). If we want a new social order we need a do-it-yourself approach to transformation. Pressing the state to support social justice misses the point because the aim should be to make the state increasingly irrelevant to this project (Trapeze Collective, 2007).

The DIY approach to popular education in the UK has been particularly active in relation to environmental struggles which bring together a loose network of direct action groups which embrace postbureaucratic principles of organisation. However, such groups can develop their own cliques in ways that are exclusive as Saunders (2008) points out in her comparison of identity in three different environmental groups. The charge of ‘ego warriors’ rather than ‘eco warriors’ raises questions about the meaningful and deep-rooted nature of such activism

(Driver *et al.*, 2012). Nevertheless, DIY activism has led to critical and creative action which can provide a stimulus to public debate. Climate change is a major issue galvanising activists and highlighting the need for transformations in structures of power and cultural practices. But the political culture of direct action groups and working class communities can be problematic and lead to conflicts between local people and climate activists over repertoires such as *sabotage* (see Coal Action Scotland, 2009).

From the DIY perspective, the state is intrinsically oppressive. It is a capitalist state beyond transformation. Moreover, in the context of formal politics without a credible political party, with a radical and convincing programme for change, the appeal of DIY activism has merits. If we cannot make large changes we can start making smaller changes now. On the other hand, there is no need to turn tactical necessity into a strategic and political virtue. In the context of powerful globalising forces the argument for local solutions seems unconvincing unless allied to building new state institutions with a global reach. Historically, one of the strategies of UK governments has been to dump problems on communities when they have little commitment to solve them. Parochial solutions to the problems of communities generated by global capitalism are unconvincing when advanced by the state or when advanced by popular educators.

None of the contributors to this anthology suggest anarchist versions of popular education in the Swedish context are particularly important. This is probably in part due to the Swedish legacy of social democracy and in part due to the long experience of a liberal constitutional democracy. In countries such as Italy and Spain, with more turbulent political pasts and experience of dictatorship, anarchist currents are stronger in popular education.

## Conclusion

In the UK, popular educators, along with a range of socially progressive individuals and groups, have to defend the role of the state in promoting welfare for those groups who most need it and are least able to defend it. This is not simply a defensive struggle over material resources but also a challenge to the social relations that are reproduced and codified in the way particular groups are defined, processed, explained and blamed for their own plight.

Offensive measures require opening up the public sphere for new ways of thinking and talking about collective solutions to personal problems. Making space for the experiences of oppressed and marginalised communities to percolate into the common sense of public thinking is an opportunity that the current context creates. One of the contradictions of the legitimacy of the market state is that traditional ideological arguments – and the political parties that control them – seem to be increasingly out of touch with everyday thought and feeling. This is an opportunity to exploit.

The goal of ‘participatory parity’ involves defending and extending claims for social justice through keeping open channels of communication for those whose voice, experience and ambitions are currently treated as irrelevant to constructing the future. Making alliances from the ground up, and beyond territorial states, is necessary to gain leverage on decisions that potentially injure communities.

One of the current policy measures of the UK Conservative led coalition government has been to adopt the Swedish model of so-called ‘free schools’ to undermine the control and influence of the local state over education. Parallels in the UK and Sweden are not as inappropriate as they might first appear and popular education can learn from more socially progressive developments in Sweden. Moreover, Swedish popular education needs to guard against trends towards the market-state. If it does not, then the types of experience highlighted by Rydbeck, on women’s popular education and Osman’s analysis of ethnic minority groups, may become more widespread.

## Notes

- 1 The international Popular Education Network was established in 1997 and was started by academics from Barcelona, England and Scotland. I was one of its founder members and subsequently its coordinator. The aim of the network is to link and support academics with an interest in popular education who may be working in isolation in their own sector of higher education. The PEN definition of popular education in the chapter reflects the structural and materialist analysis that the founder members broadly shared. The network meets biannually in conferences but regular information is also distributed via an email list. For further information email: Jim.Crowther@ed.ac.uk.

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