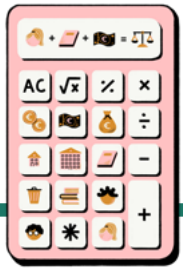
GREEN EUROPEAN JOURNAL

VOLUME 23
SUMMER 2022

MAKING OUR MINDS

UNCOVERING THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION



LESSONS UNLEARNED

JAMIE KENDRICK & BEATRICE WHITE
FOR THE EDITORIAL BOARD

The politics of education suffers from a paradox. Education systems are among the institutions that shape individual lives and wider society most profoundly, yet they remain neglected as a subject of political debate and reflection. Though rarely the subject of front-page news or late-night international negotiations, education is one of the most powerful tools that modern societies have to shape their present and future, and to make sense of their past.

The sheer size and complexity of education systems can partially account for this. Institutional juggernauts, their time horizons extend well beyond electoral cycles. The consequences of reforms and investment can take years to materialise. As the everyday struggles of teachers and educators show, education can find itself relegated to the "second-order" activities of care and social reproduction that are wrongly taken for granted, despite its critical role in shaping individual and collective wellbeing and values [Cherici and Ambrosini].

Far from an area of life sheltered from the great challenges of our times – inequality, the fate of democracy, wars, and pandemics – the world's many ongoing crises are played out in education systems everywhere. This edition sets out to uncover the politics of education in Europe. It seeks to understand how the stresses of a changing world are reflected in Europe's classrooms, lecture halls, and workshops, and argues for education's role in bringing about the more sustainable, just, and free society that Green and progressive movements fight for.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, Europe set itself the objective of becoming a knowledge society. This goal turned out to be more rhetoric than substance (it soon marched in step with precarity and austerity), but the aspiration for a well-educated society in which all have the opportunity to learn, master, and develop their passions is a noble one. After all, a society of individuals empowered by knowledge and learning that shares common references, values, and understandings can only be achieved through education [Göpel].

Today that ideal is some way off. We live in an era of multiple inequalities, a fact vividly reflected in education systems. In many places, cuts and underinvestment chipped away at the possibilities for education offered by welfare states and parallel private systems emerged to fill the gaps. Education became a driver of inequality rather than a tool to fight against it. For many, especially the displaced, simply accessing education is a struggle [Spinelli]. In other places, a quality universal education system is yet to emerge to replace institutions built under totalitarianism [Banach].

The world has changed profoundly since modern education systems were first built. Career and life paths are more varied and unpredictable. European societies are increasingly intertwined with one another through integration, migration, and exchange. In turn, they form just a small part of a wider global community connected by culture, communication, and trade.

The task of education in the digital age is more complex than ever. Amid a digital revolution comparable to the invention of the printing press, teachers and students must today navigate an information system that is dense, convoluted, and contested [Von Reppert-Bismarck]. But a more fundamental problem is that today's education systems operate amid a wider crisis of legitimacy and meaning. Cast in national moulds, schools, training institutions, and universities expanded throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries to prepare people for the battlefield, the factory, and the state apparatus. As the narratives of that era become unstuck – most starkly that of steady material development based on destroying the natural world – so too do the foundations on which education systems were built.

Any idea that education can be politically neutral should be dispelled. In recent years, education has borne the brunt of neoliberalism through sweeping reforms and cuts in many countries. This project puts public education systems under pressure, starving them of resources and converting educational attainment into an asset class [Ventura]. Nationalism and nation-building have always been at the heart of modern public education. In the hands of the far right, this educational project risks leaving pupils with an idealised and reduced version of the past, wherein nations are the predetermined units of history and conservative values are naturalised [Dziergowska]. In times when bridge-building and peace are more important than ever, the danger that education is used to reinforce divides [McKeown Jones & Čehajić-Clancy] and even lay the ground for conflict cannot be overlooked [Besliu].

What then can the Greens provide as an alternative for Europe's education systems? As this edition explores, seeds of resistance and change are already being sown. From the introduction of new approaches to sustainability in the classroom [Fioramonti] to determining the skills needed for the green transition [Suarez], there are growing efforts to put ecology at the heart of education. With forms of knowledge and authority changing, empowering people in their autonomy is just as crucial, whether that means liberating the mind from the distracting influence of technology [Bell] or entrusting teachers with both the freedom and resources to educate and inspire [Jürimäe]. In pluralist societies where previously marginalised voices and experiences are increasingly being heard, it is also essential to formulate curricula that reflect this diversity [Soiresse Njall] and allow the academic community to confront society and its ideas free from stigma, pressure, or constraint [Fassin and Pető]. Green education should equip future citizens to grasp the changes of a world in flux. This means emphasising approaches that inspire people to understand the world and its interrelated mechanisms in all their complexity through unlocking each and everyone's innate capacity to learn independently [Di Stefano] as well as nurturing their impulse to discover [Klein].

For a political tradition that is so connected to science and knowledge with so many activists and supporters drawn from education, we can ask whether Green politics has paid enough attention to its own politics of education. To win support across society, Greens will have to do more than show the strengths of their technical solutions or convince voters that the green transition can be a source of security and prosperity, critical as those points are. They will also need to tap into the deep power of cultural change [Gaudot].

More than a stepping stone to employment or a means to define an exclusive community, Green politics should therefore set out a radical and expansive vision of why and how we should learn. This vision should link education to today's great challenges: facing a mounting ecological crisis, dismantling structures of injustice and oppression, and building the basis for democracy and peace. By introducing the spark of change into education systems and building on the positive steps already undertaken, it can help define a renewed and inclusive form of citizenship beyond the nation and open up learning beyond the walls of the classroom in an exchange with the wider world.

Any project of building a different society goes hand in hand with reimagining education. A precondition for change is the capacity to see the world differently. For the Greens, it is a potential too precious to pass up.

MAKING SENSE OF THE WORLD

WHY EDUCATION IS KEY TO CHANGE

AN INTERVIEW WITH
MAJA GÖPEL

A precondition to creating a different world is the capacity to imagine it. But many education systems continue to bear the imprint of the industrial, nation-state societies they emerged from. What would be required to empower people to first envision and then build a more sustainable and just society? A conversation with economist Maja Göpel on how education could spark the shift.

GREEN EUROPEAN JOURNAL: The world we live in is organised in fundamentally unsustainable ways, from its economic structures to how we lead our daily lives. We're headed down a dangerous path. How is this unsustainability linked to the way we think about the world?

MAJA GÖPEL: There is a long-standing tradition in Western countries of seeing a divide between humans and nature. We conceive ourselves as the species that can subordinate everything else. This influences our way of receiving and experiencing the world, including our mindsets and the ways we think.

The Enlightenment idea was meant to be about developing the ability to think for ourselves so we could act as stewards of our fate, but the individualism that emerged from it was taken too far. We lost all humility and set out to reshape everything according to our desires. Furthermore, at least in the last century, we've lost a certain connectedness to the systems we are embedded in. We understand the world in parts on which we try to put price tags, but we're losing sight of the networks of life that sustain us and thrive on their connections as much as their parts.

Some treat the transition to a more sustainable world as a technical, largely regulatory, matter, while others view it as a simple question of taking political power. What about shaping how we see the world? How important are new concepts, narratives, and language to social change?

The essence of liberal societies – at least as the idea was originally coined – involves deliberation over where we want to go and how best to get there. Assuming they are not simply pushed through by decree, the legitimacy of the resulting proposals comes from how people view the world and how the proposals are explained and put forward.

How we view the world has been fundamentally changed before, one of the most notable shifts being the Copernican Revolution. When you read the 1987 Brundtland Report,[1] it refers to a more recent moment of humility for humanity: the photo of Earth shimmering green, blue, and white – the Blue Marble – taken by the crew of the Apollo 17 in 1972. This image brought home the realisation that we need to understand the workings of our planet if we want it to stay habitable for us. Subordination metamorphosed into co-stewardship. Of course, if we change our outlook on life to this degree, it will shape the way in which we organise our goals and institutions. This is why our education systems need to be at the forefront of empowering people to make sense of their existence in the world and how it is changing over time.

School is all about preparing people for the world. What is the role of school and education more broadly in transforming how we think?

School is so important because it is in our younger years that we are moulded most dramatically. And it has a strong cultural aspect. Next to the knowing, there is the being, the interacting, and the shaping of what you feel responsible for. What we've seen in our societies – I know Germany best, but this is true for many Western countries – is that education focuses more on comparative performance, metrics, and demonstrating your familiarity with canonised knowledge. It doesn't push you to find your own way, to understand how your existence is influenced by the setting you are growing up in, or to work out how to achieve a good balance between co-creation and competition. Grading is just one example of education's very industrialised way of looking at things, as if norming and ranking young people could help them develop freely and happily.

1 Published in 1987 by an international group of politicians, civil servants, and experts on the environment and development, the Brundtland Report, also known as *Our Common Future*, draws attention to the importance of sustainable development and articulates a commonly accepted definition of this concept.

As a result, students care mainly for their position within the system and how they can improve it; they give less thought to the system itself and how they could improve that instead. Today's elite schools promise parents certain marks and networks so that their children can go on to hold influential positions, when what we really need is for education to focus on understanding society as a whole and the challenges it faces in the 21st century. Organisations such as UNESCO are pushing for this, with outlines for education in sustainable development, global citizenship, and future skills. But it seems to be painfully difficult to spread this agenda.

The teaching of future skills is based on the idea that empowering people to imagine different futures is a means to open up new horizons. In Germany, there is a growing interest in future skills within different social contexts and life stages, also in the *Volkshochschule* system, the adult education system that offers affordable courses in a range of subjects – including languages, yoga, maths, and computer programming – that are open to everyone.

Technology has many positive uses, including in education, but is there a risk that being glued to our screens will undermine our capacity to think for ourselves?

There has been a lot of focus on digitalisation in German schools recently. We have a Digital Pact for Schools with a lot of money attached to it, but this focuses on putting hardware in schools, not training teachers to educate pupils in digital resilience. We don't just want to train everyone to become "users" of apps designed by other people that manipulate us. We should be developing an understanding of how digital and hybrid environments shape our societies, forms of communication, and interactions, so we can engage in real dialogue about what all of this is for.

Many researchers distinguish human creativity from artificial intelligence, which primarily learns from the patterns of the past. To create something entirely new is still a capacity unique to humans, just like empathy. But we have lost our fascination with the potential of our species and the living world. Instead, people are getting excited about robots that look like humans. Hey, we're already here! Invent something that helps support life, not replace it.

Should we be designing our education systems to encourage people's capacity to imagine and dream?

I think it's crucial to get more into the imaginary space again, and the movements that connect science, art, and policymaking are doing just that. In some ways, it is a matter of selection. The people who want to be imaginative have been pushed into the sphere of art and culture,

TO CREATE SOMETHING ENTIRELY NEW IS STILL A CAPACITY UNIQUE TO HUMANS

while everyone else has to stay "realistic". We should allow more people to take a step back, to question the deeper purpose of their undertakings, and imagine them taking a completely different form without being labelled utopian. In the end, it has always been the big ideas that galvanise energy and focus to reshape the present that, step by step, truly change the world.

Cracking open the status quo is crucial for innovation. As children that is exactly how we are. Why is it this way? Why does it have to be that way? There is an inquisitory mindset that asks whether things can be done differently. Looking at the world through a child's eyes can create that imaginary space and also bring out the joy of discovery rather than the fear of a loss of control.

Opening up to desirable future states can have so much motivating power; then we can talk about what we need to do to make this possible. We need to stop dismissing imagination and dreams and confining them to the private sphere, to arts, and to religion.

What about schools themselves? You attended an alternative school. How do you think it shaped you? Are there any principles that you would like to see more of in all schools?

What I found to be important in the way my school was run was that it had clear selection criteria, designed to mix people from different walks of life. We weren't allowed to have too many kids from academic backgrounds in the group, for example. It was supposed to be representative of the local community. There was also an emphasis on being a co-teacher. There are always students who find it easier to understand whatever is being taught and those who find it trickier. So sometimes you'd be teaching and at other times you'd be taught. It meant that you grasped the content better, but you were also forced to try to understand other people's brains and recognise that we all learn differently.

LOOKING AT THE WORLD THROUGH A CHILD'S EYES CAN CREATE THAT IMAGINARY SPACE AND JOY OF DISCOVERY

The other aspect was the broad variety of things that we learned. We had a school garden and workshops for wood- and metalwork, we made jam, we had a disco, our playgrounds were very adventurous. We experienced a lot of things, and no one was judged to be more or less important. From Year 8 on, we developed projects of our own and were encouraged to engage with a particular subject that we found intriguing. I ended up doing telescopic observations of the moon and developing the photos myself. This whole alternative process of finding my own way to grasp and explore the world was judged to be just as valuable as writing something academic with loads of footnotes. The emphasis was on recognising that there is a wide variety of ways to make sense of the world. What is your way of learning and train of reasoning? How can you bring the most out of yourself? It's why we didn't get marks until the last two years: as a signal that there are many ways to meaningfully engage with the world.

It sounds like a good mix of autonomy and cooperation.

Yes, and also going with what is fun. My daughter has been to two schools. The first was a conventional one that put students under a lot of pressure and encouraged peer competition through grading and judgment. Students were told off in front of the whole class, adding shame and pride into the mix. Now she is at a school that capitalises on students' excitement about exploring the world to help them learn. She and her classmates were fascinated by the Greek gods, so the teacher decided to extend that thematic block and fit other learning goals into it. They invented their own gods and goddesses, wrote stories about what they protected and why, and created comic strips describing why they felt these characters could complete the pantheon.

This flexibility – sensing enthusiasm about something and then adapting the teaching plan or method to combine this with the requirements of the curriculum – is the true art of teaching. It creates a different energy. I notice such a difference in my daughter's approach to learning and its purpose. I think it's crucial.

We've been talking about education as a tool to help people see the world differently and hopefully change it. Does the Green movement engage enough with education? Is there too much focus on technical solutions and not enough on the cultural battle to define the society we want to see?

That's a difficult question. Following the pushback and fights that resulted from the publication of the 1972 report *The Limits to Growth*, I remember co-author Dennis Meadows saying that he felt we had forgotten to include culture as a core aspect alongside the social, environmental, and economic. I've noticed this in two ways. Firstly, our understanding of what we consider a successful life and appropriate behaviour. How can we find it okay to treat animals the way we do just to have cheap meat on our plates every single day, for example? Is it really an encroachment on our freedom if this is challenged politically in order to curb carbon emissions?

The Green movement has been accused of moralising so often that it now tends to argue from an economic or technical point of view, for instance, by stating that its policies will help to control health expenditure. Obviously, there is room for a more technical approach, but if we shy away from ethical considerations, we completely lose touch with what we're talking about. Moral revolution, as Kwame Anthony Appiah and others would say, is fuelled by feelings and reputation, not by economic considerations. In the same way, every single business should be capable of presenting the social and ecological impacts of its operations. This would marry the two and make economic calculations support moral judgments. For this to happen, we need a different narrative about where we want to end up and a reference framework that supports it.

The second aspect is the way we conceive of culture as a framework for action and experience. Shared common values that help us to define what we consider to be acceptable or unacceptable behaviour are fundamental to any society that wants to avoid too much surveillance and control. Such values are the basis of any social contract, and are manifested in legal systems.

Today there is a widespread sense that we are living through an extended, multifaceted crisis and that the narratives underpinning our institutions no longer hold. Gramsci's famous words "the old is dying and the new cannot be born" are often quoted to capture a sense of this. Why do you think these words are so relevant today?

As with every thinker, it's crucial to talk about Gramsci's concepts while bearing in mind what he was attempting to get a grip on. What was the question he was trying to answer?

The concept of hegemony explained how power can be maintained with the least resistance, even under circumstances of inequality. For Gramsci, it was the narratives that explain why things are the way they are that serve as the cultural glue, structuring public discourse and legitimising different roles in society.

When there is a close match between the dominant narrative and people's everyday lived experiences, it is difficult to change things. But the status quo becomes shaky when the dominant narrative no longer gives convincing answers to society's problems. Right now, three of the major narratives of the last 40 years are imploding. First, the idea that we can decouple economic growth from environmental harm in absolute terms. There's just no evidence for this, though it has been the supposed goal for decades. Second, the idea of trickle-down economics. Cutting taxes for the rich does not encourage them to invest in the productive economy unless they think they can profit from it, and currently their priorities lie with rent-seeking and speculation. The third narrative is that what is good for finance will benefit the real economy. The way that the world of finance, totally cut off from the real world, is enriching itself while hiding its wealth from the tax authorities is now obvious to all.

The collapse of these three narratives has broken the hegemony of the Washington Consensus. Politically, this means that we're experiencing structural crises for which the typical explanations no longer work. As a result, the window is open for transformative change. This will need to be guided by new narratives that bring together different actors under a shared agenda. Ideally, we should have as many people as possible educated – and encouraged – to participate in shaping these new visions, narratives, and activities. This would be the ideal situation for liberal societies and for democratic renewal.

So we need to build that new narrative, and education can be a means to get there?

Absolutely!

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INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE OUR GREATEST RESOURCE

AN INTERVIEW WITH
LORENZO FIORAMONTI

Public education systems are vast institutions that work to a time horizon far longer than the average political cycle. With public funds scarce and political attention limited, education's key role in bringing about wellbeing, social justice, and sustainability is often neglected. We spoke to Lorenzo Fioramonti, former Italian minister of education, universities, and research, about the challenges of reforming education systems and why ecology should be at the heart of learning in the 21st century.

GREEN EUROPEAN JOURNAL: In 2019, Italy made the headlines for being the first country to introduce sustainability education as a subject into the school curriculum. You were minister of education at the time. Can you tell us more? What has happened since?

LORENZO FIORAMONTI: When I became a cabinet minister, I was asked to reintroduce civic education into schools; this had been discontinued for 15 years. I proposed that it be changed to education on sustainability. I have always been convinced of the need to teach sustainable development, but I also believe in the practical rather than passive teaching of the subject. In 2019, one hour a week of education on sustainable development was introduced, during which students work on sustainable citizenship projects, take part in activities in their local area, and learn about the circular economy, from the school's energy balance to understanding the interaction between social dynamics and pollution.

Changing the curriculum is always a complex operation, so I was happy with an hour a week to start with. However, after I resigned as minister,

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This article is available in Italian on the *Green European Journal* website.

INVESTIRE NEL FUTURO: I GIOVANI COME LA PIÙ GRANDE RISORSA

Lorenzo Fioramonti racconta il suo tentativo di riformare la politica educativa italiana e mettere l'ecologia al centro dell'istruzione.

the initiative floundered. Although schools have introduced this hour, there is a lack of leadership from the ministry and no detailed guidelines or specific teacher training course, so many schools just do what they can. To some extent, this is emblematic of the dilemma our country faces: the government changes every year and there is this very Italian culture of office holders feeling they should undo the work of those who came before. Change is seldom brought about without continuity and leadership.

You resigned after the government failed to provide the level of public funding for research and education that you deemed necessary. Can you tell us about your decision?

In our election manifesto, we had promised a very serious and innovative programme for schools and universities that started from the idea of reversing two decades of cuts. But almost immediately, promises began to be broken. As a university professor lent out to politics out of a sense of public duty, I found myself a minister of the schools I love and absolutely without the means to achieve what I had promised.

Both privately and in public, I pointed out that our election promises were not getting the attention they needed. I hoped that the then-head of government would reassess the situation. However, this did not happen and so I resigned, also to be at peace with myself.

Education and research in today's politics are considered second-tier issues, so much so that politicians who want to progress in their careers are careful not to be ministers of education, universities, and research. Human capital is the true energy resource of a country, and it is developed in schools. The minister of research and education is the minister responsible for building the future of the country.

The pandemic shook education systems around the world. What was the impact in Italy? Can any positive legacy be found from the experience?

Overall, I think it went pretty badly. Some schools may have managed quite well, but too many children fell out of the system. The pandemic hit a generation hard and caused significant psychological damage. However, we can learn from our mistakes.

First, we discovered that we only knew how to teach lessons in the traditional way, and that we used technology as if it were a substitute for face-to-face lessons. To be effective, technologies need to be adapted to the teaching model, which is not the case at the moment.

Second, we understood how difficult it is to manage a school system composed of large institutions full of students, what I call the "shopping malls of education". The trend during recent decades has been precisely that: of closing small schools and concentrating

OUR SOCIETY DOESN'T NEED PURE INTELLECTUALS OR PURE TECHNICIANS

masses of students in huge comprehensive institutions that do not work, especially from the teaching point of view.

I hope that the pandemic has shown how important it is to go back to neighbourhood, town, and village schools: a network of small schools that are interconnected and more easily manageable, employ innovative teaching methods, and could even offer some community education programmes.

As minister, you expressed a desire to put the climate and the environment at the centre of education and public research. Can ecology provide this direction for our education systems?

There is no alternative to making ecology and sustainable development the compass of our education and research systems. The great challenges in the history of humanity have always had an influence on what, and how, we teach. We need only think of the diffusion of the liberal arts, as they are known in English-speaking countries, and how they emerged from the great challenges of the Enlightenment period: human rights, individual freedom, and the abolition of the *ancien régimes*. The liberal arts became the basis for modernity and cultural growth.

Today, the existential challenge of our times is ensuring sustainable development that can safeguard human life on this planet. It is above all a challenge that new generations will face. How should schools and teachers respond? Education needs to take sustainable development as its starting point and re-examine the world of school and our educational model, piece by piece.

What would that mean in practice?

I have always said that sustainable development should become a thread running through all subjects, and this is dependent on the introduction of a transdisciplinary approach in schools.

For example, today we still teach history as a succession of dates. However, this approach does not teach an understanding of the underlying phenomena that have given rise to societies over time. Otherwise, how can you understand why France developed in a different way to Germany, or why some civilisations have disappeared, while others have not? We stop studying the ancient Egyptians as if their civilisation simply disappeared. What is missing is the historical importance of the interaction between society and territory. Students need to understand that societies develop in a certain way because of their environmental contexts.

This is history as the great innovative historians have studied it, but it is very different from

the notional approach found in schools. Even subjects such as literature can be understood better if we are aware of the interactions between territorial and environmental cultures. If you study the Romantic poetry of Giacomo Leopardi divorced from its geographical context, can you really understand it?

Your background is in wellbeing economics. What is education's role in human wellbeing and quality of life?

More than oil, gold, or money in the bank, the true wealth of a country is its human capital. The vision of a country becoming wealthy and prosperous with an under-educated population is outdated. It is no coincidence that the economies that fare better are not the ones with raw materials but rather those with grey matter.

For an economy based on wellbeing, investment in schools, education, and research is investment in excellence. Following this logic, wealth would be better calculated by measuring how cultured a population is and how capable it is of innovation. This human capital should form the basis of a new GDP unrelated to how many cars are produced. Measuring prosperity in those terms is an approach that would be best left to the past. Today's economies are economies of knowledge and innovation, even if Italy is going in the opposite direction.

The Italian education system sends pupils along different streams – with an emphasis on science, classical education, or vocational subjects – at quite an early stage. Some argue that this differentiation creates inequality. The separation between "hard sciences" and "human sciences" could also be seen as unhelpful in the era of ecological crisis. What is your opinion?

I am in favour of educational streams, and I do not think we need a comprehensive school that takes us all the way through our school careers. What is important is quality. All streams of education must foster professional skills, social and scientific in nature, that allow students to understand how the world works and deal with new technologies. And a transversal approach is essential. Our society doesn't need pure intellectuals or pure technicians; we need intellectuals who know how to use their hands and technicians who know how to use their brains.

In Milan and Rome, children from better-off families are sent to classical high schools (*licei classici*). I think it's a big mistake to make a fourteen-year-old attend a classical school on the basis that this is the best choice. Classical education does not give you the skills increasingly needed nowadays. Even for a career in the humanities or linguistics, some of the biggest growth areas rely on technology, such as computational linguistics. Today, studying

classics without developing technological skills means training for a job that no one needs. The same is true for technical schools. Unless the social, human, and scientific dynamics that lie behind the use of technology are understood, we will create an army of mere operators.

Is there a stigma attached to pursuing a more vocational route as opposed to one based on the humanities?

The problem is that better-off parents often choose to send their children to schools frequented by other better-off families. This has little to do with the school itself and far more to do with the fact that families know that the social relationships their children will build – with the children of notaries, pharmacists, and lawyers – will be key to their futures. Once upon a time there were arranged marriages within the ruling elite; today they are among the middle classes.

Hypothetically speaking, if the rich all decided to send their children to the worst schools, the effect could be the same. If we had to choose blindly – as John Rawls would say, behind a veil of ignorance, for instance by some sort of lottery – perhaps we would have the chance to get the best out of all of the various streams of education.

Italy has been suffering from one of the highest general and youth unemployment rates in Europe for decades. What needs to change in education to meet this challenge?

To solve youth unemployment, we need to ensure that young people become the new entrepreneurs. In Italy, there are still relatively few people ready to throw themselves into innovation and the world of business. Being an employee is still considered a successful career. An entrepreneurial culture needs to be cultivated. We need to nurture start-ups of all kinds and provide funding and training opportunities for people who want to create the companies of the future.

These opportunities are the only way to generate the level of innovation in the economy that then produces jobs, especially among young people. A country where the dominant entrepreneurial fabric is the small and medium-sized enterprise, largely family-run and mainly managed by men in their sixties, is unlikely to develop in a meritocratic way. Companies guided by young people are companies that employ other young people. That is why we need to cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset, starting from schools and universities.

THE AIM SHOULD NOT BE TO HAVE LOCAL PEAKS OF EXCELLENCE BUT RATHER WIDESPREAD GOOD QUALITY

As in many European countries, access to a quality education in Italy varies geographically: across the country as well as within cities and regions. What can be done?

Our country's socio-economic problems arise out of the fact that there is a stigma associated with certain regions and areas, which is reflected in the educational system and institutions in those places. As long as we continue to have dormitory neighbourhoods in our cities – places in which people sleep but don't live – this problem will remain. The children of these neighbourhoods are often sent to schools that are some distance away because the ones in the neighbourhood, if there are any, are of poor quality. This is also why villages without schools have become depopulated. The only way to fight this loss is to have schools in every neighbourhood and to make sure they are equipped with all of the tools they need to raise the quality of teaching. The local neighbourhood school in the countryside must offer the same opportunities as a school in the centre of Milan.

The aim should not be to have local peaks of excellence but rather widespread good quality. Italy will only be able to boast of success when 90 per cent of its schools are moderately good; having a handful of schools that are among the best in the world is not enough.

Italy has received the largest tranche of the EU Recovery Fund; one of its aims is to strengthen innovation. What is your opinion on the spending plans for education and research?

The extra resources made available by Next Generation are excellent, but as often happens with European funding, training and research structures are supported rather than individuals. Italy has too few researchers and too many underpaid teachers. Even if these billions do materialise, without simultaneous investment in people we will have clean, newly repainted schools but little else.

Additionally, European funds are often used to substitute Italian funds. If your department receives EU money, your state funding goes elsewhere. It should be precisely the opposite: if European funding can cover the costs of laboratories, the Italian state should find the funds for the researchers to work in them.

Traditionally, the EU has limited competences in the field of education, which remains a largely national, if not regional or local prerogative. Would you consider greater integration of European education systems as a positive development?

Since I am in favour of more local schooling, I support the concept of school autonomy. For example, I would like schools to be managed in collaboration with parents,

including through parental initiatives. Without school autonomy in the past, ground-breaking pedagogical approaches pioneered by the Reggio Emilia model, Maria Montessori, and the School of Barbiana would not have developed: we would have just been left with the fascist schools of the interwar years.[1]

Today we need schools to be integrated into a network model, not a pyramid: schools that have the greatest degree of autonomy but are in continuous collaboration. Personally, I like the idea of a teaching model that allows students in a mountain community in southern Italy to learn English with a native speaker based in England, all while ensuring essential levels of performance. In other words, international parameters, with funding and performance measured at a European level, combined with local management giving every school and region the freedom to choose its own way of achieving them. This would help to create schools that enjoy greater autonomy while maintaining a sense of a common goal – and have much more fun in the process.

Whether for the nation-state or the Church, public education has historically been a means to build a common identity and a sense of belonging. In recent years, this role has receded as societies have become more fluid and multifaceted. Can building ecological citizenship lend meaning to the mission of education in the 21st century?

Yes, absolutely. The generation currently under 20 will rewrite the rules of the game, similar to what happened during the immediate post-war period that saw the birth of the Republic. We are at a comparable turning point in history. We do not need the *contrade* or a return to medieval times to feel a sense of identity.[2] Education has an essential role to play in creating an identity based on the society we must build. Today's schools could be the sites of creation for a sustainable citizenship, forming a new generation of founding figures who will rewrite our constitution, our laws, our rules – and perhaps create a different Italy.

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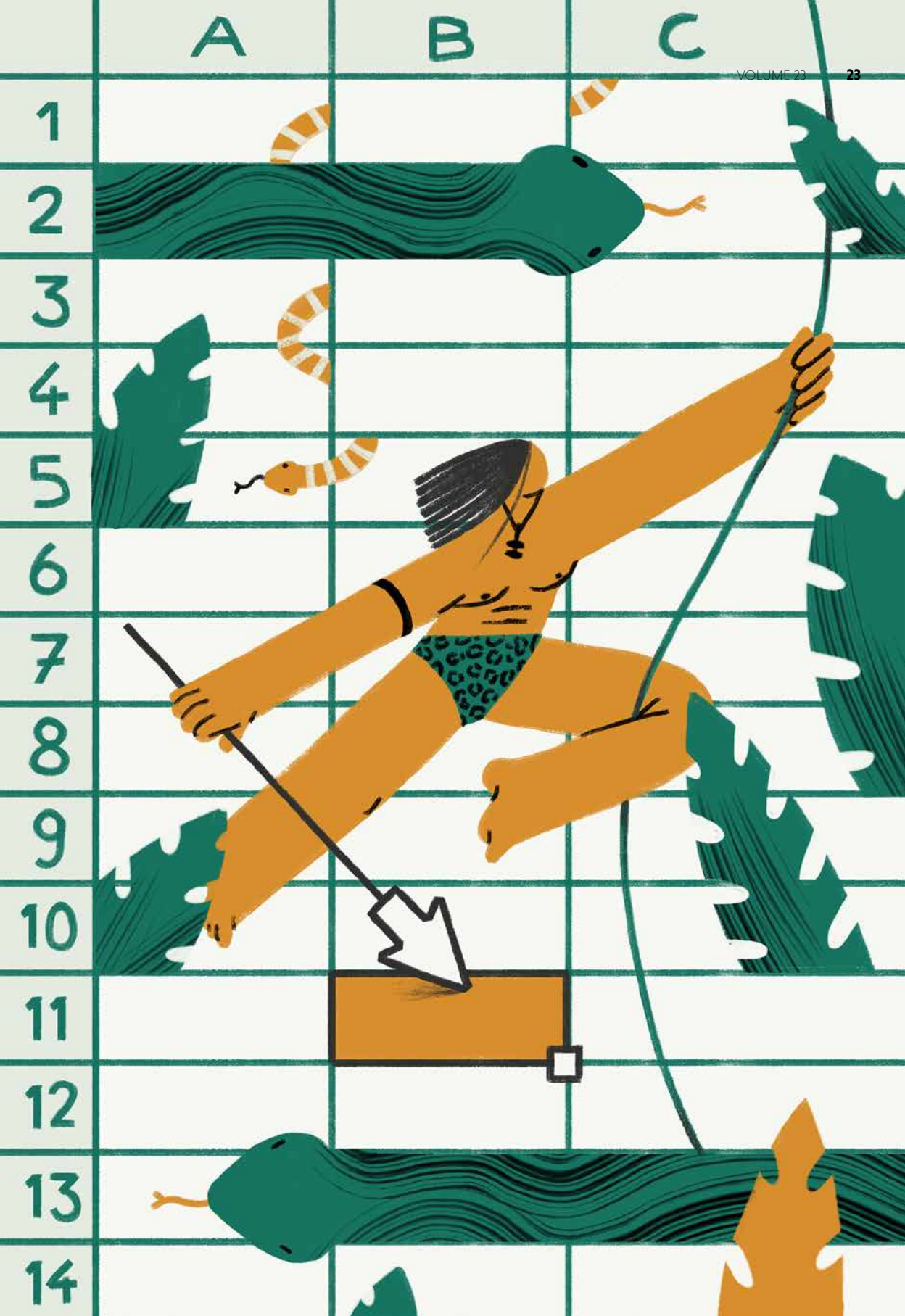
1 Developed in the 20th century in different parts of Italy, the Reggio Emilia and Montessori approaches emphasise early years education and student-centred learning, while the School of Barbiana stressed social justice-orientated teaching. All three were informed by the impulse to change the world through education.

2 Historically, Italian cities were divided into districts – *contrade* – that were the source of intense local pride and rivalry.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CAN THE GREEN TRANSITION SOLVE SPAIN'S EDUCATIONAL PARADOX?

ARTICLE BY
CRISTINA SUÁREZ VEGA

Young people in southern Europe face uncertain prospects after they leave school, with youth unemployment remaining stubbornly high since the financial crisis. Equipping them to thrive in this challenging environment is a tall order, especially when many schools lack the right resources and direction. Could Spain's investment in vocational education offer lessons in how to connect education, social justice, and the green transition?

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This article is available in Spanish on the *Green European Journal* website.

¿PUEDE LA TRANSICIÓN VERDE RESOLVER LA PARADOJA EDUCATIVA DE ESPAÑA?

Cristina Suárez Vega pregunta si la formación profesional en nuevos empleos verdes puede ofrecer una alternativa que pueda combatir el desempleo juvenil obstinadamente alto.

Bringing a dinosaur back to life is no easy task; it requires great skill and effort. As education specialist José Antonio Marina argues in his 2015 book *Despertad al diplodocus* (*Reviving the Diplodocus*), Spain's education system is this comatose dinosaur. An enormous creature with great strength and power, yet one that is eternally asleep. As the world changes, the education system marches on, sticking to the basic lines of a welfare state conceived of long ago. It tries – without much success – to educate the young people who will one day form the backbone of Spain's future.

Since the financial crisis, the thread that connects Spain's education system to the real world has worn increasingly thin. In 2022, youth unemployment in Spain sits at 29.4 per cent, the second highest in the EU after Greece. According to Eurostat figures, one in four people who graduated from university in the last three years are unemployed, despite their qualifications.[1] In 2007, the percentage of graduates in work in Spain was 87.7 per cent, just above the European average of 86.9 per cent. Today, the graduate employment rate lags almost 10 per cent lower, with Spain one of the worst performers on the continent.

1 Eurostat (2021). *Youth Unemployment*.

A university degree is therefore no guarantee of dignified work. This central promise of the education system has been broken, and young people find themselves studying for careers that no longer exist. Education and the economy have become decoupled. While the economy is constantly changing, with emerging sectors hungry for new skills, the education system clings to the inherited, meritocratic, Industrial Revolution-era notion that, despite all the evidence, a degree offers the route to a sound financial future.

TURNING THE CORNER?

But the dinosaur might still wake up. The collateral damage of the pandemic in Spain, as elsewhere, left the labour market on the brink of collapse. Youth unemployment peaked at 42 per cent at the height of the pandemic, and Spain was once again at the foot of the leaderboard with the highest youth unemployment in the OECD.[2]

At the same time, the number of students enrolled in vocational education (*formación profesional*) was on the rise. The figures for the year 2020-21 were 5.2 per cent higher than the year before, leaving thousands of students without training places. After decades relegated to being a "second choice" option for those who did not go on to university – Spain is the OECD country with the lowest percentage of students enrolled in vocational education (12 per cent) – vocational education was becoming recognised as more important than ever.[3] And there is good reason to widen the scheme. According to government statistics, the youth unemployment rate for this type of education does not even touch 7 per cent.

The question is, if vocational education offers greater job stability, why do universities remain the preferred route? Faced with this deep-rooted contradiction, Pedro Sánchez's Socialist government – the first governing coalition to include the left-wing Podemos party – has opted to allocate part of its share of the EU Recovery Fund to modernising vocational education with the intention of tackling youth employment. Two billion euros have been earmarked for this purpose in Spain.

Looking beyond the pandemic, Spain had already accepted the ambitious global and European challenge of decarbonising its economy before 2050 to try to curb the worst consequences of climate change. Tackling such a transformation requires a metamorphosis of the economic and social system from all sides, especially if the socially destructive side effects of such a process are to be avoided. A just transition that alleviates inequality rather than adding to it implies a rethinking of the foundations of all economic and social institutions.

2 "La pandemia transforma a España en el país con mayor tasa de desempleo juvenil de la OCDE". *El País - Cinco Días*. 7 March 2021.
3 OECD (2021). *Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

A JUST TRANSITION THROUGH EDUCATION

Spain published its just transition strategy in 2019. The plans combine a package of measures to be implemented at state level and through the different autonomous communities (sub-national governments representing Spain's different regions and nationalities). The objective is to harness the green transition to open up new employment sectors. Through the previously approved climate law (Ley de Cambio Climático y Transición Energética) and the national energy and climate plan, the just transition plans place special emphasis on the creation of green jobs via the promotion of renewables and by developing transition agreements through state support to vulnerable sectors and companies. Education is also covered, with revisions to educational curricula at all levels aiming to bring students closer to the future green economy, including vocational education.

The energy transition that the government's green strategy hinges upon will require a large labour force trained in skills that are often scarce. "We need to double our numbers in the coming years because the indicators warn that more than half of new jobs will require such skills," explains Clara Sanz, government secretary-general for vocational education.

Across the EU, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) estimates that the European Green Deal will create more than 2.5 million new positions in green sectors by 2030.[4] Beyond green jobs, the Observatory on Vocational Education and Training in Spain anticipates that the country will need to cover up to 10 million job vacancies between now and 2030, mainly due to worker retirement.[5]

According to Marta Suárez-Varela, an economist at the Bank of Spain, demand for the technical skills needed to retrofit housing and install renewable energies will be crucial to the green transition. The Spanish government is betting big on the renewables sector due to the country's potential for harnessing its natural resources, which include sun, wind, biomass, and lithium. Spain is the third most attractive country worldwide for green energy investment, according to the US real estate firm CBRE Group.

Related sectors such as construction, systems installation, and green finance, as well as emerging technologies in areas such as green hydrogen, electric cars, and energy efficiency, will soon expand. "Investment in training is essential for European funds to be effective and, here, dual vocational education

4 Cedefop (2022). *An Ally in the Green Transition*. Briefing note 9166 EN. March 2022.
5 Juan Pablo Gamboa Navarro et al. (2021). *Informe 2021: La FP como clave de desarrollo y sostenibilidad.* Madrid: Observatorio de la Formación Profesional en España.

A JUST TRANSITION THAT ALLEVIATES INEQUALITY IMPLIES A RETHINKING OF THE FOUNDATIONS OF ALL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

– combining education with an apprenticeship in a company – plays a key role," Suárez-Varela points out. "The adaptation of training needs to the skills demanded by companies would allow a better adjustment of a labour market in which, currently, despite high unemployment levels, many vacancies remain unfilled due to the lack of workers with adequate skills."

This assessment is supported by Cedefop: "In Spain, there is a certain degree of overqualification: young people graduate with university degrees but work in jobs that require skills that could be gained with an intermediate degree," says Ernesto Villalba, an expert with the organisation's department for vocational education and training. "Two fundamental aspects come together here: on the one hand, education needs to be connected to the world out there, and on the other, the fact that in the face of such a changing and adaptive labour market, it is important to be constantly learning."

Alongside a new vocational education law that consolidates dual training, the government's new plan seeks to modernise the training offer and create 28 new degrees linked to emerging industries. These include green sectors as well as new digital sectors such as data, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and robotics. The funds will finance the creation of 200,000 new jobs and support the accreditation of professional skills for those who acquired them on the job. The goal is to increase the percentage of Spaniards with intermediate qualifications (secondary school diplomas and vocational education) from 24 per cent to 49 per cent in the next 10 years. But first, the dinosaur must be awakened.

HURDLE AFTER HURDLE

Although the government's plan has been applauded on paper, experts are unsure as to how it will fit with the existing education system, mainly because the separation of work and education also stems from a deep-rooted cultural tradition. Compared to other western European countries, Spain underwent industrialisation quite late. As a result, there was no formal vocational education framework until 1975, when it was added to the well-established humanist university tradition.

This resulted in the technical professions being undervalued by society, while education legislation prioritised university degrees. The government's proposals for vocational education even refer to the aspiration to put an end to the "diabolo model", a term sometimes used to describe the Spanish education system. Like a diabolo that has ends much wider than its centre, Spain has high percentages of people with tertiary degrees and, at the

PROMOTING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IS NOT ABOUT DISCREDITING UNIVERSITIES BUT FINDING THE MIDDLE GROUND BETWEEN THE TWO PATHWAYS

other extreme, with very few qualifications, such as those who have completed only basic secondary education. In the narrow centre, you find the small percentage of Spaniards studying for professional qualifications.

Unlike in Finland or Japan, Spain has no state pact for education designed to protect education systems from political ups and downs and the whims of the electoral cycle, including by ringfencing funds. Such legislation should prevent education systems going through the upheaval of constant reform. According to independent media start-up *Newtral*, Spain passes a new education law every five years; this translates into eight reforms since the beginning of the transition to democracy in 1975.[6] Education expert José Antonio Marina has worked on Spanish education for decades: "We have passed too many laws and yet we have not been able to generate great interest in society in education: in the latest *CIS* – a state survey that consults Spaniards on their main concerns – only 7 per cent of those surveyed said they were concerned about the state of education."

This lack of consensus fuels a problem that is proving even more difficult to solve: the under-funding of state schools. At present, education spending in Spain fails to reach 5 per cent of GDP, compared to 6.3 per cent in Denmark, 6.2 per cent in Belgium, and 6.0 per cent in Estonia. In the absence of a state pact that would definitively protect spending, the money allocated to education is variable and a source of constant uncertainty. The other side of the coin is that low public spending is mirrored by high private spending that, particularly in school education, is a source of greater inequality in access to education.

Control over education policy is a devolved matter for autonomous communities. Different parties govern in the various regions, and they hold the responsibility for setting budgets. The fact that they are also able to change aspects of the curriculum means that the door is always open to ideologically motivated disagreements, particularly over a huge brief such as education. Following the approval of the most recent education law in 2020, which sought to prevent students from repeating years, seven autonomous communities opposed its provisions and put forward alternative measures.

These swings complicate the development of educational curricula, which creates added difficulties for teachers. According to Alejandra

6 María Blanco (2020). "A un ritmo de una ley cada 5 años, ningún Gobierno sin su ley educativa". *Newtral.es*. 19 November 2020.

Cortés, permanent researcher at the UNESCO Chair in Communication and Educational Values and professor at the University of Zaragoza, "It is a question of stability, as much economic as educational. The lurching of political parties cannot influence what is taught in the classroom." The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has itself expressly called for political consensus in order to ensure the allocation of the proper funding and to connect the educational curriculum with market demand, stressing the urgency of putting an end to the other major problem of Spanish education: early school leaving.

Although the rate of early school leaving reached its lowest level since records began in 2021 (13.3 per cent), Spain still fell short of the European target of reducing dropout to 10 per cent. "A curriculum that turns its back on society's needs leads to students dropping out of the system," acknowledges Secretary of State for Education Alejandro Tiana. "In addition, there is a lack of places in vocational education. Most of those who have left have basic qualifications but have not found places in which to continue their studies."

Alejandra Cortés, who also criticises the obsession with dictation and learning by rote that has always characterised Spanish education, agrees with this point: "Good development means that even early childhood education and care must take the technical into consideration. We need to teach transferable skills beyond the theoretical: technical skills, conflict resolution, communication skills..." However, developments in society leave room for hope: "Fortunately the image of vocational education is becoming much more positive: families and students see it in a much better light. It is something that should be taken advantage of." It is not about discrediting universities but rather finding the middle ground between the two pathways: "Many of the students I work with do vocational education first and then go to university, acquiring the practical background of one and the academic background of the other. It is very enriching."

EDUCATION FOR THE FUTURE

The threat of climate change and the political commitment to decarbonise the economy has shed light on something that was previously overlooked in the Spanish education system: the connection between education and a just transition. The rates of early school leaving and youth unemployment were clear signs that a different approach was needed. Going beyond just "teaching to produce", the planned changes could potentially signal the classroom becoming a place that evolves in step with a world in continuous transformation.

As Tiana points out, "The great fractures in different educational systems occur when important changes in society are not reflected

in the knowledge, skills, and attitudes with which society believes its young people should be endowed […] It is our obligation to teach values, skills, motivations, and attitudes that help someone become an active citizen in the society in which they are going to live."

Can boosting the vocational education system in order to support the green transition play its part in the wider reinvention of our education systems (and therefore the welfare state)? Like a tree, each root of what defines us as societies plays a fundamental role in overall growth. If one evolves, so must the rest. Putting an end to the idea of "university = work" and opening up other pathways may also help to germinate new models of work that address other issues. These include working-time reduction, the four-day week, longer paternity leave, and the relative importance of sectors overlooked in education such as care and tourism, both significant contributors to Spain's economic prosperity.

For this to happen, Spain's political class must make the necessary moves to facilitate an environment of change. Abandoning deep-rooted habits requires collaboration across the board. It is complicated, but evolution is fundamental to the wellbeing of societies. It all starts with education. If the diplodocus were to finally open its eyes and take a first step, the mark it would leave would be indelible, and generations would learn from it for centuries to come. ■

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ROMANIA'S (UN)EDUCATED YOUTH

ARTICLE BY
IOANA BANACH

Among the growing Romanian diaspora residing in the EU are thousands of highly educated graduates pushed to look for opportunities and better living standards abroad. As Ioana Banach explains, this brain drain is also a consequence of the deep problems of Romania's education system that need to be addressed. She examines the evolution of Romania's schools since transition and highlights the opportunities to bring it into the 21st century.

Recognising the prosperity that high levels of education promise for the European public, the European Union has committed to improving educational systems across the bloc. But without major educational competences, its focus is limited to monitoring the quality of education in member states from the rate of early school leaving to university attendance. Its findings on Romania give compelling evidence to the calls for structural reforms of the country's education system.

Despite various reforms over the past decade, Romania's education system still underperforms; in 2021, the share of early school leavers remained as high as 15 per cent, way above the decreasing European average of under 10 per cent.[1] More than 1 in 5 Romanian youths aged 15 are at high risk of educational poverty, lacking the basic competencies in reading, writing and science, while attainment levels in tertiary education remain under 25 per cent, way below the European average of 40 per cent.

1 Eurostat (2021). *Early leavers from education and training.*

Met by a poor, disengaged and corruption-ridden society, as well as a hierarchical and rigid work culture, many highly educated Romanians seek better social rights and living standards abroad, leaving family and friends behind. Nowadays, as much as a fifth of Romania's population resides abroad, mainly elsewhere in the EU. This level of brain drain is exceptionally high for an EU member state, and devastating to Romania. For every emigrant with a Romanian university degree, the country loses about 45,000 euros. In the medical sector alone, around 2000 graduates emigrate every year – the equivalent of a 90-million-euro yearly investment loss. The majority never return to live in Romania.[2]

The long-term effects of the recent pandemic-induced health and economic crisis are yet to be fully grasped. During school closures there was little support for teachers, students, and parents in finding their way through the maze of digital learning, and nearly a third of Romanian students lacked the necessary digital infrastructure to follow online classes. Almost 50 per cent of the country's teachers called for more and better tools to teach online.[3] These challenges put more Romanian youth at risk of educational poverty and social exclusion in the long term. Yet in 2021, the financing of the education system reached record-low levels – at only 2.5 per cent of the country's GDP and half of the European average – showing that little will be done to prevent a further decline.

In the current context, it is hard to believe that Romanians once took pride in their schools. The ambition for a modern, balanced, and democratic education system shaped after the French and Italian models gained momentum in the years between the two world wars. From one generation to the next, teachers and students took part in the transfer of knowledge and values, while education was seen as a springboard for many young people, often from challenging backgrounds, to find their way into intellectual circles.

From 1948, the Soviet occupation brutally disrupted this system. Combatting critical thinking, self-determination, and individualism, reforms aimed to rapidly re-educate the archetypal communist teacher and student. Propaganda-based education deployed two main tools: fear of verbal and physical violence as punishment for misbehaviour, and repetition (diligently memorising the contents of school manuals directly translated from Russian).

While the socialist doctrine is not the sole culprit for Romania's pedagogical decline, this period in its history cemented the

2 OECD (2019). *Talent abroad: a review of Romanian Emigrants*. Paris: OECD.
3 Save the Children Romania (2020). *Vulnerable children had limited access to food, education and medicine during emergency (Save the Children Study)*. Bucharest: Save the Children Romania.

systemic malformations noticeable today. Presently, schools are politically controlled institutions, embedded in hierarchical nepotistic networks, where "model" students are expected to think, grow, and act identically. Products of a pedagogical project built on the foundations of behaviourist theory, teachers are still trained to control classrooms and push students to absorb the given curriculum. The rigid curriculum, coupled with an anachronistic "read-memorise-reproduce" approach, guarantees an underwhelming and disengaging classroom experience, and, even more importantly, suppresses curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking.

THE ROMANIAN SCHOOL OF THE FUTURE

The perplexing journey of Romania's education system over the past decades reveals the need for a more radical solution than any government has so far been willing or able to bring about. Forging welcoming schools for future generations requires the intentional exploration of two complex and interlinked dimensions. First, Romania needs to develop a pedagogical project that is fit for purpose and fuelled by vision and potentiality rather than one that simply patches up what is already there. Second, seeing how reforms have failed or been reversed before they have any chance of coming to fruition, the only way to move beyond the current deadlock is to completely overhaul the balance of power, as well as the heavy politicisation of key positions in the education system.

Before envisioning a future Romanian school, a question that merits deliberation is: why do children go to school? Today, schools are organised as conveyor belts, transporting students towards a predetermined destination: the job market. The current system treats youngsters as assets whose value is tied to future employability. Many of those alienated by the education system make up what has become the largest share of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU, while those who made it through often end up working abroad, feeding the paradoxical situation in which the country suffers from both high unemployment rates and a lack of workforce.

But what if education was so much more than that: a journey of self-discovery, a pathway to personal fulfilment, and a laboratory for experiencing the society we live in, as well as envisioning the one we are striving towards?

From this perspective, the Romanian school of the future takes on a fresh, new shape. First, schools become havens of safety and non-violence. Verbal and physical violence, perhaps the most damaging scars of the totalitarian regime, become a thing of the past. A new, extensive teacher-training programme and psychosocial education lessen

FOR EVERY EMIGRANT WHO GRADUATED FROM UNIVERSITY, ROMANIA LOSES ABOUT 45,000 EUROS

and ultimately eliminate any form of school abuse. Future educators learn to manage stress and identify how they have been socialised to resort to violence in the face of adversity. These are indispensable skills they can then transfer to their students. In the Romanian schools of the future, a system of peer support and continuous mentorship guides teachers who need to cope with a profession that is both demanding and rewarding. Receiving social recognition and decent pay, teachers are no longer tempted to focus on the private classes they give on the black market for the privileged few, instead seeking the success of all their students equally.

Rooted in autonomy and self-determination, schools relinquish their rigid curriculum, while educators and students become free to experiment and create. Through individualised learning tracks, students are guided to discover and strengthen their talents, as well as address their shortcomings. By learning about and practising active citizenship, a key element of the learning curriculum, students deepen their awareness of the impact they can have on society. They develop their vision for the future and are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and grit to fight for it. Identifying the most effective path for each student to reach their final learning destination and fulfil their potential becomes the true art of the teaching profession.

In the Romanian school of the future, power is decentralised, and school directors and teachers play a much more central role in its management. Learning-based school management transforms not only the teacher appraisal process, but also student evaluations. Students in particular benefit from regular and qualitative feedback on both their cognitive and emotional development rather than a number-based grading. Schools are depoliticised, and the process of "inspection" – once a tool of control and punishment by politically influenced governmental services (inspectorates) – is replaced by constructive dialogue and multi-directional feedback involving school directors, teachers, parents, and the local authorities.

IT HAS BECOME EVIDENT THAT EDUCATION PLAYS A CRUCIAL ROLE IN EITHER STRENGTHENING OR WEAKENING DEMOCRACY IN ROMANIA

While elements of this vision might be shared quite widely in Romania, reality paints a different picture. If nothing else, the many (failed) attempts to reform the system stand as testimony that the task at hand is not an easy one. So what will it take for Romania's schools to become democratic and impactful spaces where students feel welcome and empowered to step into their futures? And why hasn't the system been drastically reformed, despite the deep need for change?

A PRIORITY FOR MANY, A MISSION FOR A FEW

The sorry state of Romania's educational system is an omnipresent priority on the political agenda. In a troubled political context, where a new government is formed on average every one to two years, reforms are introduced and dropped faster than they can be implemented. The curriculum has seen numerous updates, as have teaching manuals and the grading methodology. In 2018, the Romanian president took his turn at promising reforms that would take on the immense task of overhauling the education system and bring about the much-needed school of the future. A national programme – Educated Romania – was designed to bring about a series of public policy proposals. Some of its envisioned measures to combat school dropouts have since been included in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan and will be supported by EU funds. What the president's project fails to deliver , however, is a comprehensive, long-term vision to back up the proposals, as well as a pathway towards the much-needed systemic revamp of the Romanian education system.

Delivering a long-term alternative was seemingly the aim of the Social Democrat (PSD) Minister of Education Ecaterina Andronescu. In 2009, she partnered with an expert from the Finnish education system to deliver a vision statement entitled Education Unites Us. The document proposed an education system that places students at the centre of the pedagogical project, adheres to the principle of subsidiarity in decision-making about children's education, and introduces a strong focus on active citizenship.[4] The ambitious proposal enjoyed ample albeit short-lived media attention. The minister's political party, whose voter base is predominantly made up of people with lower levels of qualifications (only about 9 per cent of PSD's voters have attained tertiary education), dismissed the proposal.[5] Andronescu did not enjoy much support from

4 Ministry of National Education (2019). *Education unites us: a vision of the future of education in Romania*. Bucharest: Ministry of National Education.

5 Camelia Badea (2020). "What is the profile of the voters of the winning parties and how did AUR manage the big surprise." *Spot Media*. 12 September 2020.

opposition parties or civil society either. It was her fourth mandate as minister of education and her political career had been marked by controversy: from scandals around equipping schools with computers via no-bid contracts worth millions of euros to allegations of plagiarism in her academic work. Crucially, many teachers also rejected the vision as they found it unrealistic. The implementation of Education Unites Us has stalled ever since and Romania still awaits a credible political force to translate a vision of its future education system into tangible policies.

In the meantime, some teachers across the country are engaging in a David-and-Goliath-style fight against the system to create more fulfilling classrooms. They work with parallel lesson plans – the official one, which follows the school curriculum and which they present to their superiors during appraisals – and an alternative one, adapted to the needs and talents of their students. Escaping the classical model in which the teacher sits behind a desk and preaches in front of the class, they close the distance between them and their students, both literally and figuratively. New Horizons Foundation is an NGO that trains and mentors teachers – often from economically deprived areas – in service-based learning, an educational approach that enables youth to apply the theory they learn in the classroom to real-life activities, such as volunteering, advocacy, or other avenues of civic engagement. Some of their programmes focus specifically on green service learning, equipping youth with competencies to become engaged in building a more sustainable future and combatting climate change. The results are promising: the NGO reports higher rates of tertiary education attainment among their over 17,000 programme alumni, as well as an increased sense of trust, independence, and empathy.[6]

Throughout its turbulent past, it has become evident that education plays a crucial role in either strengthening or weakening democracy in Romania. With few Romanians graduating from university and a large part of its workforce emigrating, children are often left behind to be raised by their grandparents. The education system is not delivering on its promises and certainly does not meet the EU's ambitious goals for competitiveness and innovation. Restoring the role of education, while tackling the deep inequality it perpetuates, represents a key driver in the transition towards a more socially just society in Romania. Forming a new generation of young people ready to make a change is key to building a new political and social model based on the values of democracy, social justice, peace, and ecology.

6 Fundatia Noi Orizonturi (2022). IMPACT Clubs.

Civil society actors and teachers are demonstrating extensive know-how and tried-and-tested alternative education methods that can have an impact despite the complex context. To become the norm, rather than the exception, they need the backing of a larger movement that can place constant pressure on the currently disinterested political class and keep the issue of education on the public agenda.

In recent years, the Romanian governments led by traditional parties faced the largest street protests since the fall of communism, which primarily coalesced around traditional Green topics such as ecology and democracy. This large-scale mobilisation is a sign of a growing appetite for a representative force that can renew the political model in Romania. A political programme that places education among its priorities has the potential to galvanise a diverse pool of stakeholders into action: from civil society actors to teachers' unions, from parents and grandparents to youth movements and university students. Romania seems to be ready for a progressive political movement that can envision, and more importantly, deliver a different education system and occupy the hollow space on the left of its political spectrum.

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STUDIES IN SUBVERSION
THE BATTLE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

AN INTERVIEW WITH
ANDREA PETŐ &
ÉRIC FASSIN

Across Europe, higher education faces attacks from multiple sides. In Hungary, the authoritarian government has taken steps to curtail academic freedoms and restrict the space for scientific study and political debate. In western Europe, politicians and media figures have singled out certain disciplines as places of ideological inculcation where freedom of speech is suppressed, and the social fabric is threatened. University professors Éric Fassin and Andrea Pető explore how these developments fit into broader trends reaching beyond national borders, and why these attacks undermine the independence and pluralism of academic enquiry.

GREEN EUROPEAN JOURNAL: In Hungary we have seen a sustained attack by the Fidesz government on academic freedoms and a targeting of certain disciplines such as gender studies. Why is gender studies perceived as such a threat?

ANDREA PETŐ: Gender studies scholars have long warned that an attack on their subject is just the beginning of a broader attack on democracy. Gender studies is the canary in the coal mine for the state of liberal democracy in a country. Both the removal of gender studies from the list of accredited studies in Hungary and "Lex CEU" were part of the conservative legal counter-revolution during which the Fidesz government used the available legal framework to attack liberalism, democracy, and democratic institutions.[1] The anti-gender movement

1 Legislation put forward and expedited by the Hungarian government in 2017 that was seen as specifically targeting Budapest's Central European University in order to make it effectively unable to continue to operate in the country.

HISTORICISING TRUTH DOES NOT MEAN THE END OF TRUTH – É. FASSIN

is not merely another offshoot of centuries-old anti-feminism; it is also a nationalist neoconservative response to the crisis of the global neoliberal world order.

The problem is that politicians still do not consider higher education and academia a strategic element of national security. The fact that higher education is a national prerogative rather than an EU competence also made both the Central European University (CEU) and gender studies vulnerable. Like pandemics, higher education and academic research are inherently transnational. What happens in Hungary's illiberal academia should be a concern for the whole academic community. Hungarian students and researchers participate in exchange programmes across Europe and the world. If there is no effective quality control of academic work, and if demonstrating loyalty to the rich and powerful is the only way to get ahead, this infects the higher education systems of other countries as well. The basis of science and teaching is trust in standards; if results are fraudulent and untrustworthy, this can be profoundly damaging.

ÉRIC FASSIN: This is not specific to one country. Campaigns against gender started with the Vatican; they exploded in France in the early 2010s, and they have since spread to many countries, in particular in Europe and Latin America. Even Putin has now joined the crusade.

Why gender? This has to do with what I call sexual democracy. I developed this concept prior to the anti-gender campaigns to make sense of the politicisation of gender and sexuality through public controversies; about same-sex marriage, in particular. Why should some feel that this is the end of the world? I argue that it has to do with sexual democratisation. We live in societies that claim to be democratic, in the sense that the social order is supposed to be defined not by some transcendent principle (God, Tradition, or Nature), but by "us". Of course, this raises the question: who are "we"? Who can participate in defining the world we all live in? The democratic logic means that those who are left out can protest, and perhaps eventually redefine who "we" are. Same-sex marriage is a case in point. Sexual democracy means that even the sexual order is defined by "us"; so it is open to change and subject to contestation. This triggers an anthropological panic among conservatives. Sure, they usually pretend to favour a democratic model of society, but they insist on limits. Sex is their imagined refuge, safe from history and politics. For them, the sexual order exists outside history and politics; it is a natural order, as if the body were not a social as well as a biological reality. This is why they have a problem with gender: it denaturalises sex.

In France, there has been a chorus of alarmism – among right-wing commentators but also government ministers – about the end of freedom of speech and the idea that universities have become places of infiltration and indoctrination. The disciplines of critical race theory and post-colonial studies have been singled out as threats to the social fabric. How do you view these allegations?

ÉRIC FASSIN: President Emmanuel Macron initiated this polemic in June 2020 as a way of launching the campaign for his 2022 re-election. In *Le Monde*, he accused academics of seeking to divide the Republic by "encouraging the racialisation of society". This was a prelude to attacks by Minister of Education Jean-Michel Blanquer, who, after secondary school teacher Samuel Paty was murdered [for showing students cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad], denounced an "intellectual complicity with terrorism". Academic "Islamo-leftists" soon became the target of an investigation announced by Frédérique Vidal, then minister of higher education. The timing of the president's attack coincided with the end of the first lockdown. Discrediting "intersectionality" was paradoxical when it became clear that articulating race, gender, and class was essential to understanding the pandemic, both epidemiologically and in terms of "care". Moreover, this was also the moment when social movements could reclaim the streets and precisely when the echoes of Black Lives Matter resounded in France most loudly, with demonstrations against police violence and racial profiling.

The refusal to acknowledge systemic racism, as well as Islamophobia, can help us to understand the attack against academia; as if such notions were purely ideological, as if they had no empirical reality. This comes at a time when these concepts have become part of the repertoire available for younger generations. Academics are thus accused of corrupting the country's youth. What it shows, in fact, is that those in power acknowledge the intellectual circulation between academia and social movements, hence the attacks against the politicisation of the social sciences.

Some conservatives have taken aim at post-modernist thinkers such as Michel Foucault for supposedly undermining respect for facts and objectivity, thereby encouraging the rise of "post-truth" and a decline in public trust. Why the focus on these schools of thought as a destabilising force?

ÉRIC FASSIN: In France, a conference against "deconstruction" (defining philosopher Jacques Derrida as the ancestor of "woke culture") was organised at the Sorbonne in January 2022. This was introduced and supported by the minister of education.

There are two accusations levelled at academia. On the one hand, relativism. On the other, dogmatism: anything goes and cancel culture, queering identities, and identity politics. This contradiction is significant. Critical thought does question the absolute authority of truth. But historicising truth does not mean the end of truth, only of what could be called a theological regime of truth. Raising the question of who is excluded from current definitions of the world does complicate our understanding of truth, but it makes it more truthful, not less.

This is why "post-truth" has nothing to do with Derrida or Foucault. Indeed, it comes from the other side of the political spectrum. We owe "alternative facts" to Trump's entourage; this became apparent in the campaigns against so-called "gender ideology" or the absurd rumours propagated by Bolsonaro about Fernando Haddad, his main political rival in the presidential election, planning to introduce "gay kits" in primary schools. On the contrary, academia is defined by the obligation to avoid what Princeton philosopher Harry Frankfurt called "bullshit". Academic freedom is justified by the obligation we share to avoid bullshit (as much as possible). We have a duty to try and maintain an empirically informed, theoretically consistent approach to the search for truth; it may not be absolute, but we nevertheless pursue it as rigorously as we can. That is actually the reason why academia is under attack: critical thought is the best remedy against bullshit. This explains why the far-right proponents of "alternative facts" hate what we do: academic freedom is the obligation to resist the devaluation of truth.

ANDREA PETŐ: Illiberal politicians and oligarchs have recognised the importance of educational institutions not only as a means to channel public money into their pockets, but also as sites of knowledge production, authorisation, and transfer that can be used to train loyal supporters and disseminate ideas abroad. There is nothing wrong with being conservative in higher education, but here we are talking about a new phenomenon.

Illiberal forces are hijacking higher education for their own gain and emptying it of values. They need the academic authority granted by these institutions not only to legitimise their ideological agenda, but more importantly to secure employment for loyal supporters. They can then train further supporters who will take over existing educational and research institutions. Scientific arguments are used to support ideological moves. Illiberal politicos also refer to surveys and research conducted by their own "experts", with the difference that the surveys do not meet academic standards and boast neither authorisation from academic institutions nor measurable scientific achievements.

OUR MAIN CONCERN SHOULD BE THE DEMOCRATIC VALUE OF CRITICAL THOUGHT, RATHER THAN THE MARKET VALUE OF KNOWLEDGE – É. FASSIN

Is this part of a broader trend of anti-intellectualism across society, or is it a more limited elite strategy to justify reforms and manipulate public opinion for their own ends?

ANDREA PETŐ: Anti-intellectualism is a modus operandi of illiberal states. It employs a two-pronged strategy: channelling resources from often critical intellectuals to their loyal supporters, and at the same time manipulating vulnerable, underinformed citizens who lack basic critical thinking skills by instrumentalising their existential fears. Universities are attacked and parallel, illiberal universities are founded to create alternative sources of academic authorisation and sites for knowledge production. The creation of knowledge has been transformed from a citizens' right to a security issue. Universities are an easy target for illiberals, who use populist rhetoric to undermine trust in science and scientists.

ÉRIC FASSIN: Indeed, anti-intellectualism is the crux of the matter. It plays on anti-elitism. Hence the use of the polemical phrase "gender theory" in France. What this suggests is that gender is just for intellectuals. Indeed, one of the most active groups in France against same-sex marriage and so-called "gender theory" was known as "common sense". Yet another contradiction: for these people, scientific knowledge is supposed to coincide with common sense. However, by definition, critical thought does not.

Does this mean that academic work is elitist? This is a populist argument that would have us believe that the people – the "real people" – do not think. That is a fantasy common to neofascists and neoliberals. In fact, critical thought requires people to be more intelligent. This is a democratic desire: we want people to think on their own. In the face of anti-intellectualism, we need to affirm the importance of intellectual work; not just for us, but for all of society. Of course, education is economically worthwhile. But our main concern should be the democratic value of critical thought, rather

than the market value of knowledge. Anti-intellectualism is anti-democratic; academic work should focus on democracy; not just theoretically, but in practice. We have to work on the democratisation of critical thought.

Malign foreign influence on the nation is a common theme in these debates. Macron denounces Islamist separatism and American "wokeism", Orbán condemns Western gender and LGBTQI+ "ideology", and British Conservatives fear the influence of continental philosophy. Are these attacks unified by a fear of the Other?

ANDREA PETŐ: This is not about a fear of the Other, but rather using fear and othering as a policy instrument. Its aim is to create a polarised society that is easy to manipulate and to distract from the state's flaws and dysfunctional policies. As a result of Russia's war against Ukraine, Orbán has lost his allies in the "illiberal international". The anti-gender, anti-LGBTQI+ ideology is a product of [US right-wing Christian coalition] the World Congress of Families, supported – and some claim invented – by Putin as a very cheap but effective tool of soft diplomacy to undermine liberal values. Those who previously had close connections to this organisation, such as Hungarian President Katalin Novák, need to reinvent themselves in the present European context.

ÉRIC FASSIN: "The Other" does not predate political discourses about "others": it results from xenophobia and racism. Indeed, Putin can attack "woke culture" according to an anti-Western logic, but this leads him to support J.K. Rowling, who is accused of transphobia. Clearly, the West is just a bogeyman. The paradox is that these nationalistic discourses are internationalised in this way. There is an impressive circulation of rhetorical strategies among right-wing foundations, activists, and politicians, which in part explains their incredible success.

Think of how the campaign against "cancel culture" spread like wildfire: the open letter on "justice and open debate" that appeared in *Harper's Magazine* on 7 July 2020 was published in *Le Monde* the next day. Even those who imported this polemic acknowledge that "cancel culture" had not really reached France, yet they insisted that in order to resist it, the French should anticipate this threat. Is it about the American "Other", i.e. the fear of Americanisation? Perhaps. But then, what do we make of this tendency to import the vocabulary of the American Right, from "political correctness" 30 years ago to "woke culture" today?

THE POLARISATION OF ELITE INSTITUTIONS AGAINST THE REST IS NOT SUSTAINABLE IN THE LONG RUN – A. PETŐ

Is there any truth to the idea that there is a tension between acknowledging the multiplicity of voices and realities, and the necessary consensus required for a society to be cohesive? Is there a tension between a plurality of narratives and experiences and the ideals of universalism?

ÉRIC FASSIN: Universalism is not uniformity. Principles such as liberty and equality are not defined once and for all. On the contrary, they are constantly being renegotiated: that is precisely what is at stake in democratic battles. Take social movements identified by their hashtags: #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter. In France, conservatives denounce them as a kind of identity politics that undermines universalist republicanism. Is it not the opposite, though? What undermines the credibility of universalism is when this rhetoric is used to avoid addressing sexism and racism. Fighting discrimination is definitely a democratic agenda. It gives a fuller meaning to words that otherwise risk sounding empty; in particular for those that feel (and are) left out, segregated, relegated, dominated. Indeed, investing abstract words with meaning is what politics is about. Meaning is not a given; it is contested. That is how democratic societies work. Societies evolve as a result of dissensus, not consensus.

ANDREA PETŐ: There are different views on what makes a society strong. But all agree on the importance of feelings of strong belonging. What we see now is that because of the neoliberal project, not only are the institutions such as education or culture that were expected to create that cohesion weakened; the individuals who need to look for resources beyond the state to survive are also atomised. In most cases the family network and women's unpaid care work provide these resources. The illiberal model offers an alternative feeling of belonging based on borders, exclusion, and hate by clearly defining who "we" are, in opposition to "they" who are responsible for all our current problems.

How do you see this trend developing? What are the most promising strategies to affirm the importance of the humanities and social sciences against both conservative political attacks and neoliberal critiques that argue that they do not bring enough economic utility?

ÉRIC FASSIN: The present is bleak. But the future is up to us: all of us, both within and outside of academia. In practice, I believe we should work in two directions. First, as attacks against academia spread to more and more national contexts, we need to organise internationally, as we have with the Gender International, an academic network of solidarity against reactionary attacks: to

disseminate information, to analyse these phenomena beyond the national scale, and to mobilise with greater strength. Second, we academics should engage more in exchanges with social movements; all the more so since politicians have lost interest in both groups. Our job is to help make sense of what is happening; not only to us, but in the world. This is precisely the reason we are under attack.

ANDREA PETŐ: The stakes are high. The polarisation of elite institutions against the rest is not sustainable in the long run. There needs to be a renewal in higher education to reflect demographic trends and current challenges. This is particularly true for countries with illiberal systems; we already see lot of encouraging examples of institutions being founded outside the neoliberal framework of higher education. There are models to revisit from eastern Europe during communism. An example is the flying universities run by intellectuals who were not allowed to teach in the communist-controlled higher education system. Instead they met in informal places, such as private apartments, which became important semi-public spaces of intellectual exchange. These underground enterprises managed to train a generation of intellectuals who played an important role when communism collapsed. For this intellectual freedom, they sacrificed economic prosperity and personal wealth, as well as running the risk of arrest. That will be the key question for the future of tenured professors and higher educational faculty members: do they dare to venture out of the golden cage to try out new ideas, structures, and forms of teaching?

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DECOLONISING THE CLASSROOM

REFORMING EDUCATION FOR AN ANTI-RACIST SOCIETY

AN INTERVIEW WITH
KALVIN SOIRESSE NJALL

The brutal and murderous colonial campaign led by King Leopold II and then the Belgian state in the Congo has long been swept under the carpet. Civil society activists, supported by a small number of politicians, have been campaigning for years to break this silence, calling for recognition of the crimes of this chapter of history but also of the ways in which it continues to shape Belgian society and its institutions. One of those leading the efforts to decolonise the country's culture, public space, and mentalities is Kalvin Soiresse, a Green member of the Brussels Parliament, who previously worked as a teacher. He explains how this debate has evolved and outlines his vision for a national, universalist, and anti-racist education.

FR

This article is available in French on the *Green European Journal* website.

UN ENSEIGNEMENT DÉCOLONIAL POUR UNE SOCIÉTÉ ANTI-RACISTE

Kalvin Soiresse Njall, député Bruxellois, explique le travail de mémoire mené dans les institutions et la société civile pour mettre en lumière le passé colonial de la Belgique.

GREEN EUROPEAN JOURNAL: In late April 2022, a motion for a resolution to reform education on colonial history was unanimously adopted by the Education Committee of the Parliament of the Francophone Community in Belgium. What is its significance?

KALVIN SOIRESSE NJALL: First of all, it is only thanks to the struggles on the ground that we got the agreement of the French-speaking and Brussels governments needed to start this process in the first place. The second stage was actually agreeing in parliament on the texts to be voted on. The resolution I brought before the Brussels and Francophone parliaments provides for a transversal, structural, and inclusive plan on the issue of Belgian colonial history and its consequences within education (secondary, higher, and continuing), culture, and research. This text was voted on and associated with clear commitments.

The next step is to deliver on these commitments; this is a governmental responsibility. However, we are very aware that some – particularly in right-wing parties such as the liberal Reformist Movement – are blocking this process.

In Belgium, significant progress has been made in opening up a public debate over colonisation and national memory over the last decade. Is this debate moving in a promising direction despite the resistance it generates from certain quarters?

Because of my past experiences – and bearing in mind where we started – I see the glass half full, not half empty. I have first-hand experience of the time when no one talked about decolonisation; the media were silent on the issue and it was non-existent in politics. At that time I was campaigning with civil society associations, and among the Greens there were people who supported us very strongly and who had the courage to bring this issue to the negotiating table. No other party wanted to talk about it. On the other hand, there were people – in the other parties, but also in the Greens – who believed it would fade away after a few months. Today there are parliamentary resolutions, working groups, a special committee, etc. Given the depth of the movement that has grown up around this issue, and also because of the political work that has already been done, we can't simply give up. We have to carry on in spite of the polarisation and resistance we are experiencing. I have been campaigning on the ground for years, and I still do – through decolonial city tours, by speaking at conferences, symposia, debates... I sense a deep aspiration, especially among young people, to enter an era in which colonial mentalities can be overcome.

Polarisation is normal; it exists to some extent on all political issues. If polarisation is more extreme on the issue of decolonisation, it is because historically it is an issue that has not been adequately addressed in either politics or society. People have been educated based on a certain mentality and exposed to propaganda over generations, so there is bound to be a clash. But polarisation fuels debate, and as long as there is debate, we will continue to move forward.

My fear is mainly that the decisions taken won't materialise, and the diversification of public space will fail. Many concrete steps have already been taken, especially at the local level, in relation to public space and education. The ability of movements and associations to mobilise – but also the ability of the parties, elected representatives, and ministers who bring these issues to the political agenda to get results – will be decisive here.

If history is to be reframed to adopt a new national narrative, the whole population must be brought on board. Is resistance mainly due to a lack of understanding of systemic racism and the structural systems of oppression in our societies?

We have been saying that racism is structural for a long time; now our institutions are finally saying the same thing. "Structural" means that there are institutional mechanisms that do not work from an anti-racist point of view. Schools are proof of this: decolonisation should be taught in schools, but this hardly ever happens. There are shortcomings in a whole range of institutions. Today, we must reflect on how the issue of structural racism should be addressed. If we approach it only from an individual standpoint our efforts will fail, because structures influence individuals. In a company, there is a corporate culture. So if we discriminate against people with a certain skin colour and this becomes the norm, it is structural. Schools influence their students, who are the citizens of the future.

With climate change, the focus is often on individual actions rather than the systemic choices that must be made. The same can be said for racism. This is not contradictory; both approaches are useful, but systemic choices can yield far greater results than individual ones. Take an institution like the judiciary: it is clear that addressing issues related to violence against women and racism has not been a priority. The resources are not there because they have not been allocated. We do not train those in the justice system to make the fight against racism a priority.

What is the role of education in this process?

Certain elements need to be part of the curriculum in higher and secondary education, and I would argue that decolonisation should even start in primary schools. Teachers must be required to teach the history of colonisation in Africa: about what occurred in countries like Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo. It is also very important to teach about what existed before colonisation – about Africa's great pre-colonial civilisations – in order to begin to deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices.

Second, we have to teach about the history of racism. At present we don't explain to children that racism is a system, where it comes from, and how political choices made in the 15th and 16th centuries instituted it in our societies.

Finally, we need to educate teachers. Teachers are not given the tools and training necessary to teach these courses and to make the connections between history and racism. There are teachers who teach the subject very well, but this is because they are passionate and determined.

POLARISATION FUELS DEBATE, AND AS LONG AS THERE IS DEBATE, WE WILL CONTINUE TO MOVE FORWARD

You are working towards introducing a new form of citizenship education. Why is it so important, and what principles and values should underpin these classes?

We have long been told that universalism and multiculturalism are opposites. I think this is a false dichotomy. I believe that true universalists recognise the equality of diverse philosophies and civilisations, and that they are capable of building egalitarian societies in which the rights of people are respected, regardless of their origins. I think that we really have to take on the question of universalism; not from the current point of view, with its fixation on "cancel culture" and being "woke", because this is not universalism. In my opinion, this is an expression of Westernism and ethnocentrism that doesn't necessarily hold true for everyone. It is a universalism that is closed, self-centred, and cannot serve as the basis for a social project that guarantees equal rights.

For me, citizenship education courses must be able to integrate philosophical elements that are based on Enlightenment ideas, but also on philosophies that come from elsewhere to enable us to understand the diversity of society. Arab, African, Chinese, and American Indian philosophies are among those that have influenced Europe. We must equip teachers to search out references within these cultures that correspond to the Enlightenment notions of equality regardless of origin and skin colour, but which also account for the evolution of society. Human rights and universalism are evolving concepts. For example, in the original Universal Declaration of Human Rights there were neither environmental rights nor LGBTQI+ rights. These were added later. When I hear people who voted against same-sex marriage talk about universalism, it makes me laugh. Thought evolves. I don't want to hear about a universalism set in stone. We must get students to understand this. This evolution, which impacts different aspects of life, also concerns the issue of colonialism and racism. This question must also be able to evolve and be tackled from the point of view of universalism.

Inequality is rising. Rather than reducing it, education can often contribute to its deepening. What are the most urgent reforms to implement to combat this trend?

When it comes to reform, many issues come into play: democracy and diversity within schools, students' orientations... One of the great challenges is to reduce educational inequality, and this is where social diversity and the fight against racism come into play. Training teachers to teach on colonisation, and educating them on interculturalism, can also play a huge role. When I say interculturalism, this includes learning the "codes" of disadvantaged groups. There are middle-class and upper-middle class "codes" that are imposed

WE NEED TO BRING TOGETHER PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS WITH DIFFERENT VIEWS OF HISTORY, TO SIT DOWN TOGETHER AND TALK

on children who come from working-class neighbourhoods or foreign countries. This sets them up to fail, as they do not understand how the school functions, nor do their parents. To combat this, parents from working-class neighbourhoods are forming coalitions, supported by associations.

What does it mean to put heritage at the service of an anti-racist society? You say that the decolonisation of public space, for example the inauguration of Brussels' Lumumba Square, is not a concession to minorities but rather a citizenship tool.

It is not simply a concession to minorities, as the history of Belgium must include all Belgians. Certain populations and groups will obviously be affected in different ways, however.

We need to ask ourselves why we are experiencing these racism-related problems. Are there mechanisms in our history that encourage the creation of inequalities? That mean that the citizenship of some people is not respected? What solutions can be found? Such a process helps to foster social cohesion and build relationships. In the debate on decolonisation and the process of diversifying public space, we need to bring together people from different backgrounds with different views of history, to sit down together and talk. People whose paths would not usually cross, even though they might live just around the corner from each other. In some towns and neighbourhoods, these conversations around citizenship and the consequences of history on people's lives are already happening.

For me, the cultural battle is a battle for equality, which in turn must be part of the battle for political ecology. There are urgent struggles linked to the future of the planet, but we won't manage to get certain groups to join the fight if we fail to take into account mechanisms of inclusion. If we really want to build a social project based on social cohesion, we need to identify, for disadvantaged communities, the tools that

enable them to strengthen their participation as citizens. For people to fit in, so that they feel included in the vision of society that is being built. If they are left on the margins of society, they are vulnerable to being instrumentalised.

There are people who have had to fight against racism and discrimination their whole lives. What will be decisive in terms of bringing them closer to political ecology is our ability to make the connection between environmental struggles and equal rights. This is where the cultural battle lies for ecologists. We cannot remain fixed solely on the environmentalist perspective; that won't work. The population is becoming more diverse, and we need to take this diversity into account and address these broader issues. Only then will we be able to form a critical mass that allows us to make a difference in policy decisions that are crucial for the environment, biodiversity, and the climate.

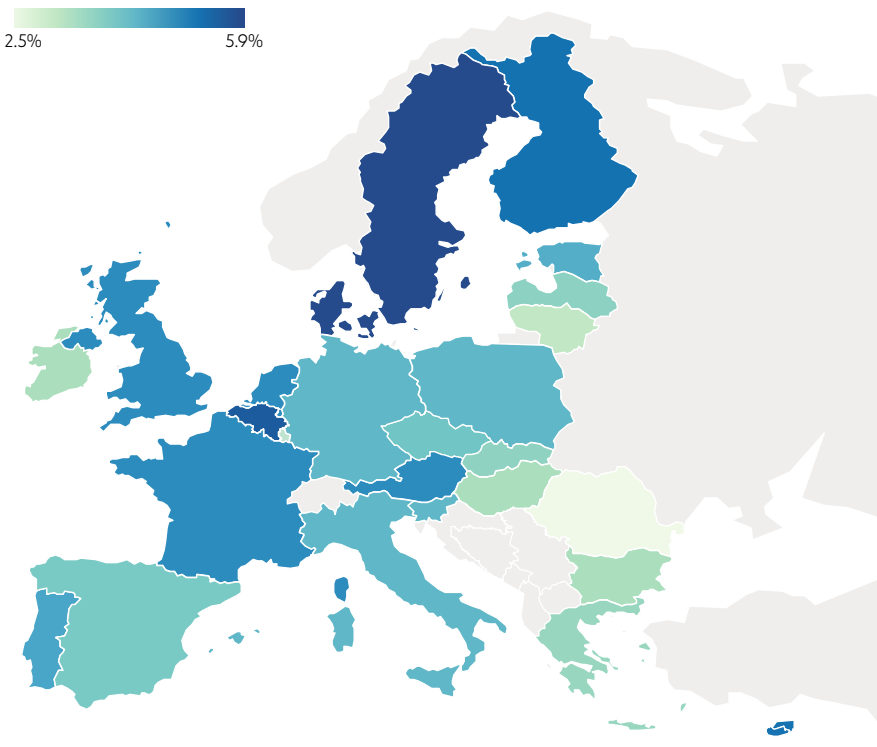
KALVIN SOIRESSE NJALL
is a Green member of both the Parliament of the Francophone Community in Belgium and the Brussels Parliament, where he works on education, equal opportunities, and decolonisation. Previously he worked as a teacher, and was co-founder of the Collectif Mémoire Coloniale, an association working to raise public awareness of Belgium's colonial history and combat racism and discrimination.

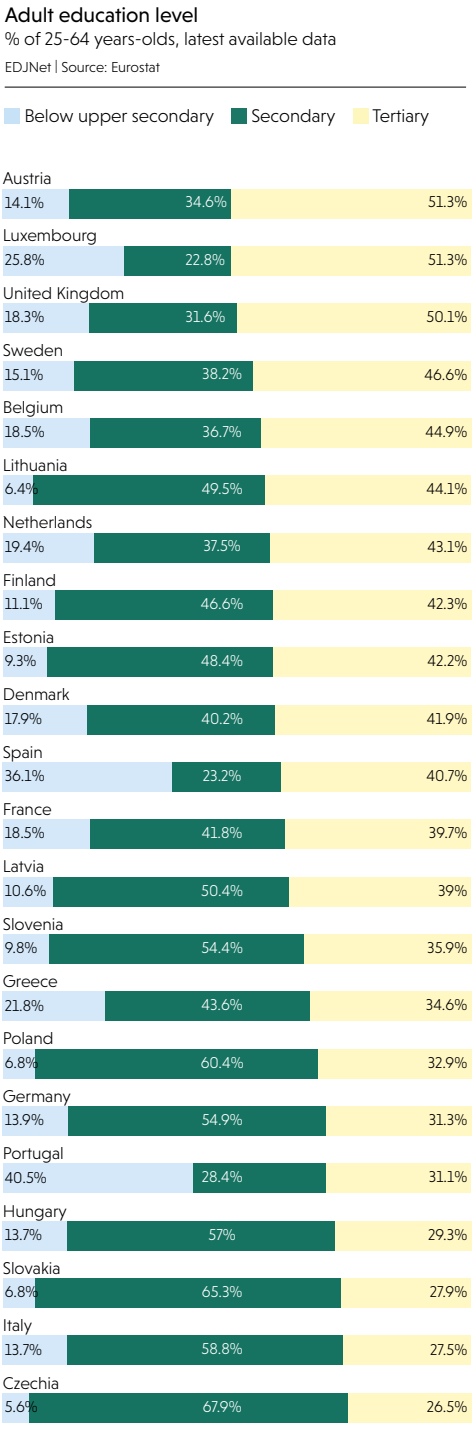
THE FAULT LINES OF EDUCATION IN EUROPE

Data and contributing analysis provided by Daniele Ruzza, an Italian freelance journalist and translator.

Education is a key to a just society, providing opportunities to learn, discover, and change. Public education makes sure that the paths it can open are accessible to all. With support from the European Data Journalism Network, we set out to examine the state of public education in Europe, looking at the levels of investment in education, participation rates, as well as its impact on equality and relation to the not unambivalent notion of social mobility.

Public expenditure on education
Primary, secondary and tertiary education, expressed in % of annual GDP, 2018
EDJNet | Source: Eurostat





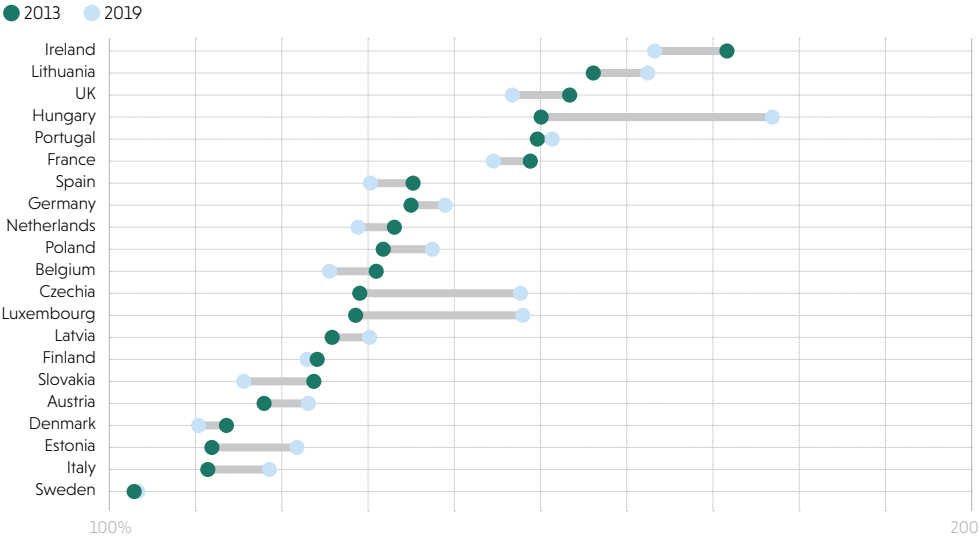
Looking at the map of Europe [opposite left], the countries that invest most heavily in education are, with Cyprus as the exception, all in northern Europe. Sweden commits the highest share of its GDP to education, 5.91 per cent, followed by Denmark, Belgium, Finland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Drilling down further, tertiary education generally receives the largest amount of funding followed by primary education. The emphasis on primary education shows how governments recognise the particular importance of early schooling.

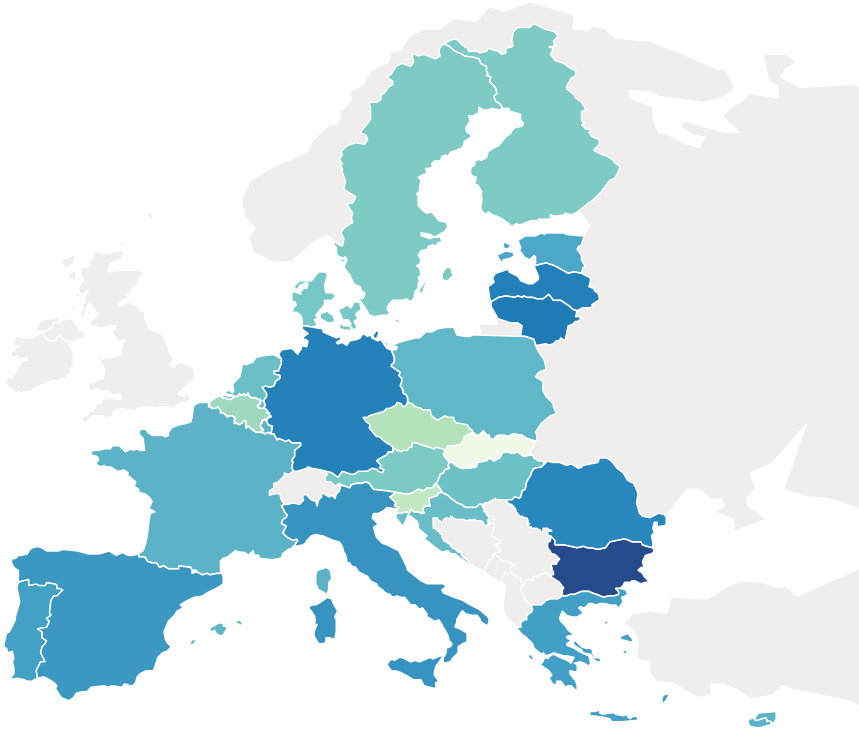
There is an almost perfect correspondence between investment in education and attainment [left]. Czechia and Italy are the two countries with the lowest number of graduates and they each respectively invest 3.67 per cent and 3.78 per cent of their GDP.

Participation rate in education and training
By age, expressed in %, 2020
EDJNet | Source: Eurostat | Full data not available for Cyprus and Romania

Education should not finish when you leave or university; lifelong learning allows people of any age to pursue interests, change careers, and develop their passions. Of course, participation in lifelong learning [right] depends on public funding, social policy, and societal norms. Here again, we find states such as Finland and Denmark leading the pack, their investment opening up access to education for people of all ages.

Trends in relative earnings of 25-34 year old adults with tertiary attainment
Change in relative earnings from 2013 to 2019, expressed in %. Earnings for upper secondary education = 100%
EDJNet | Source: Eurostat





Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income
100 = maximum inequality
EDJNet | Source: Eurostat

20.9 40

How then is investment in education reflected in equality across society? Gini coefficients measure inequality and can range from 0 to 100, where 0 represents perfect equality and 100 maximum inequality. The data provided by Eurostat looks at disposable household income [above]. With a few exceptions, the indication is that countries that invest more in education tend to be more equal. As public education is just one part of a redistributive welfare state, to say that it is an equalising force in and of itself would be an overstatement. But education, equality, and prosperity clearly go hand in hand.

Since the 2008 financial crisis, the fate of young graduates has been at the centre of the debate in many countries. The countries that were hit hardest by that crisis were often those that underinvest in education such as Italy and Spain. Young people living in countries, overwhelmingly in northern Europe, that spend more on education experienced smaller falls in incomes and opportunity [opposite bottom left].

Drawing a conclusion from these findings, a rough but clear line divides north-western Europe from southern and eastern Europe when it comes to investment in education and educational attainment. When it comes to a society's prosperity, education is found to be not only a source of higher earnings and driver of social mobility but also a factor in a country's resilience to recession and stagnation. Investing in education, after all, is investing in the future. ■

SCHOOLS FOR THOUGHT
FOUR THINKERS

In the age of push notifications, can education help us hold on to our ability to think independently? Can't we entrust children to learn by themselves? Taking a broader view, if politics is downstream from culture, could education be a brick in the wall of cultural hegemony? And should we think more critically about the ways in which education perpetuates the formal and informal hierarchies in our society? Maria Montessori, Pierre Bourdieu, Simone Weil, and Benedict Anderson – each of these four thinkers inspires, in their different ways, a reflection on what education is and what it could be.

MARIA MONTESSORI
A Radical Approach to Learning

ARTICLE BY
CRISTINA DE STEFANO

Few educational theorists have permeated mainstream consciousness to the extent of Maria Montessori (1870-1952). Rooted in the conviction that education has the power to change society, her vision put children at the centre, encouraging them to learn, and fail, autonomously. Her legacy is a global educational phenomenon.

After the disaster of World War I, there was a strong push for a change in the delivery of education as part of a broader social and political reform movement. In 1921, a large group of teachers and school reformers met in Calais, France, and created a movement known as the New Education Fellowship (NEF) with branches in several European countries. The NEF grew to become the most influential, and largest, of the organisations that came out of the progressive educational reform movement in the early 20th century. Maria Montessori was invited as a guest of honour but – too busy with her own work – she refused the invitation and sent one of her disciples instead. A century later, the names of those who took part in this international movement for a "new education" have been forgotten by all except pedagogical experts. Who remembers Beatrice Ensor, John Dewey, Ovide Decroly, Elisabeth Rotten, or Adolphe Ferrière? Yet the name Maria Montessori has become almost universally known.

Why is Montessori still a worldwide brand in education after all these years? There are two key reasons for this. One is intellectual, the other practical. Maria Montessori was not a simple school reformer: she did not want to ameliorate, amend, or change elements of the school system. She wanted to create something entirely new. Her vision was radical, which is why she remains a source of inspiration today. Yet Montessori was also a businesswoman. She created a patented method with registered didactic materials and a centralised teacher training system. The movement she founded in 1929, the Association Montessori Internationale, is still active today.

To understand Montessori's ideas, it is important to remember that she was not a trained teacher. In fact, she was a physician who had carried out research in paediatric psychiatry. In studying children's brains, she understood that they worked

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differently to adult brains. Her intuition was new and revolutionary. The child is born to learn – possessing a powerful brain and a deep innate drive for self-education – and does not need an adult to do so. On the contrary, when an adult tries to help, their presence is often disruptive to the process of self-education. As a result of this insight, Montessori set out to create a new, entirely different type of school. With specially adapted environments (in which children can move freely), tailored didactic materials (that children can handle alone, learning by themselves and self-correcting), and trained teachers (interfering as little as possible with the child's cognitive process), the new school was built around children and not adults. As Montessori put it, back in 1907, this would be a *Casa dei Bambini*, a Children's House.

Montessori first developed her ideas while working with children with intellectual disabilities in a psychiatric institution in Rome, studying and further developing the special educational materials devised half a century earlier by a brilliant French doctor called Édouard Séguin. She decided to test the impact of Séguin's approach on children without disabilities at a public preschool set up in the poor San Lorenzo district of Rome. The results were extraordinary. Three- to four-year-old children – who worked in silence, self-focused and self-disciplined – were able to read and write within weeks. Montessori soon gained the attention of foreign educators and became a worldwide phenomenon. The elites, determined to provide their children with the best education available, began to support and finance Montessori, with the result that a pedagogical method born in the slums of Rome was soon being applied in private schools in the United States and the United Kingdom.

But is the person of Maria Montessori relevant to thinking on education today? Yes, and for a number of reasons. First of all, Montessori's contribution as a pioneering female figure must be recognised. Born in 1870, Montessori attended university and became a medical doctor at a time when it was very rare for a woman to do so. Furthermore, she was a visionary with a deeply modern outlook. Through the simple exercise of her capacity for observation, combined with her intuition and medical training, Montessori made major discoveries on the functioning of the child's brain that have since been confirmed by neuroscience. She was a great observer, spending time among children as if she were in a scientific experiment; she tested every didactic concept; and she built on and refined the method devised by Séguin, developing it to reach the adult life of the student.

Last but not least, she was a profoundly radical woman. In her youth, Montessori worked as a volunteer doctor in the slums of Rome and in the countryside, where malaria was ravaging poor families. She was a feminist and a campaigner for women's suffrage who attended the first strikes for International Workers' Day at a time when this was an open and potentially dangerous sign of socialism. As an older woman, she did not give up on her ambitions to change society. Rather, she simply decided to work towards this aim at a much deeper level, through the education of the child: the future of the world.

THE CHILD IS BORN TO LEARN AND DOES NOT NEED AN ADULT TO DO SO

While more than a century has passed since she created her first experiments, Montessori's ideas are neither obsolete nor dated, and she continues to inspire education policy today. In many countries, there is great parental demand for the integration of Montessori methodologies and approaches in schools. Resistance often comes from schools themselves: Montessori classes require appropriate staff training, access to the right – often quite specific – materials, and, most of all, a complete overhaul of the school experience and the role of the teacher. Despite these challenges, efforts are being made to introduce the approach into public education. In particular, many schools are trying to incorporate Montessori classes into the regular curriculum. Particularly relevant for primary schools and preschools, these classes focus on the development of the basic cognitive processes of the child's brain.

Montessori hoped to go beyond pedagogy and education to try and change society as a whole. Implementing Montessori ideas in our schools could be a way to move towards a more peaceful society, something which is much needed today. A Montessori approach does not mean teaching "peace" in an abstract sense but rather educating "in peace". Children work in an environment that fosters freedom – to move, choose, and socially interact – without competition. The aim is to understand purely for the pleasure of understanding instead of competing with classmates over who gets the best grades.

We live in a time of great challenges, with climate change foremost among them. To respond effectively, we need creative people who are not afraid to think out of the box and dare to imagine a different world; people who are not afraid of trying and of failing. The Montessori approach teaches children that every mistake provides an opportunity to gain a better understanding of a subject matter. Today we are very much in need of more peaceful, balanced, and creative adults. However, they seem unable to rise to the task. So let us turn instead to the children. For they, as Montessori so aptly put it, are the parents of humankind. ■

SIMONE WEIL
The Price of Paying Attention

ARTICLE BY **JULIA BELL**

Our attention is constantly being usurped by the cultural and technological distractions that surround us. The words of Simone Weil illuminate how developing attention is the key not only to pursuing political objectives, but also to fully grasping the humanity and plight of those in whose name the struggle for social justice is fought.

Simone Weil (1909-1943), whose life was tragically cut short by illness brought about in part by her almost religious sense of political conviction, cuts an interesting figure in 20th-century philosophy. She stood for a fully committed connection between the personal and the political, which she embodied in her own life. Determined that she should be treated no better than her fellow factory workers, she deliberately impoverished herself, committing to a way of life so austere it would eventually kill her. When she died in 1943 in a sanatorium in England, in flight from occupied France, she was only 33. Wracked by tuberculosis but also refusing to eat, she suffered a massive heart attack. In the vein of the medieval mystics, her physical denial seemed to bring her closer to moments of revelation. Like all the best visionaries, she left behind fragments that still resonate strongly today, notably in her work on attention. These insights now speak loudly to us and to our peculiar technological and educational reality.

For Weil, "attention consists of suspending thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object. It means holding in our minds, within reach of this thought, but on a lower level and not in contact with it, the diverse knowledge we have acquired."[1] Key to understanding her is the principle that attention is embedded in the physical body and is often blocked by pride or judgment or predetermination or competitiveness; by thinking too much, putting the self in the way. Attention is not a passive, meditative state from which all feelings should be removed but a place of conscious receptiveness where it is possible to see things as they really are. Attention is really looking at the world. Not just in a superficial way, but with openness and curiosity from inside an embodied consciousness. It is this state of mind, she argues, that produces revelations, insights, moments of

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1 Simone Weil (1951). *Waiting on God*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.

clarity, and is the "object of all studies", because it is the place where moral reasoning becomes possible, allowing us to see "that this man who is hungry and thirsty really exists as much as I do – that is enough. The rest follows."

The connection she makes between attention, thinking, and acting seems suddenly crucial to our current predicament with technology. Anyone who owns a smartphone is now being preyed upon at the level of their thoughts to turn a profit for Silicon Valley. Our attention has been monetised. Our classrooms are digitalised, and knowledge has become "bite-sized", with teaching reduced to multiple-choice quizzes and games. It's important to consider how the very way we interact with technology is a "biohack": our bodies are conduits for electricity, and it is this capacity that is utilised by the haptics of a smartphone screen. "Hearts" and "likes" have a physical, emotional, and reactive effect on us. They elicit affect – feeling – but they also stop us from thinking. We become like pinballs in the machine of push notifications designed to distract us. In such an environment, what does it even mean to pay attention?

Weil defined freedom as a relationship between thought and action. If you are able to think for yourself and then act on those thoughts, then you are free, but in our new techno-reality, if our thoughts are hijacked before they've even been had, how can we know how to act? And therefore, how are we free?

It was when she was teaching at Lycée Le Puy that Weil began to think about attention. The classes she taught on the history of science were basic, the students taught by rote. They were not encouraged to ask questions or to think for themselves. She got into trouble with the school authorities for taking the students on a trip to the mines to see how coal was extracted and for going off-piste from the syllabus. It was her students who protected her and in some cases failed their exams because she had not taught the curriculum.

Education at its best is the most utopian of endeavours, the gift a society passes on to the next generation. For Weil, learning is the "gymnastics of the attention". In the paradigm shift brought about by technology, it seems more necessary than ever to equip students with the capacity to navigate this realm. To pay attention to their attention, to consider it as something precious, something useful, something worth educating.

For society to find renewal, it needs creative thinkers; people who can come up with lateral solutions to the very pressing issues we collectively face. But if their attention is being hacked out from beneath them by Big Tech, how can we encourage thought that will sit still long enough to make those kinds of connections? At a time when we are being challenged as never before on what freedom really means to us, we could do a lot worse than starting with our fractured attention spans. ■

PIERRE BOURDIEU

Cultural Capital in the 21st Century

ARTICLE BY
RAFFAELE ALBERTO VENTURA

The writings of French thinker Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) anticipated many of the inequalities felt in today's post-industrial societies. Despite the immense resources poured into education and record rates of university attendance, the promise of social mobility through equal opportunities rings hollow. Is it not time to think critically about the social function of education?

In today's capitalist societies, wealth is embodied in an immense accumulation of intellectual, cultural, and symbolic commodities. Wealth involves possessing not only a plethora of consumer products (media, art, fashion, etc.) that satisfy the social and psychological needs of a large middle class, but also the intangible assets that constitute value: trademarks, patents, networks, and even skills acquired by individuals, attested by their educational titles. Although difficult to calculate, the total value of this intangible capital – which in spite of its impalpable nature consumes huge quantities of natural resources – now greatly exceeds what is attributed to mere tangible goods. Cultural capital is the intangible wealth of nations.

German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) foresaw how capitalism – as a bureaucratic social order aiming at maximum rationalisation – would depend increasingly heavily on its educational institutions and their capacity to issue credentials to individuals. "Cultural capital", "social capital", "symbolic capital", and "human capital" are all formulas dating back to the 1960s, used in the social sciences to conceptualise or even quantify the intangible value accrued by individuals, as opposed to the pure economic value of capital in the strict sense of property and tangible assets.

Weber had already noticed that "class", constructed on the basis of economic criteria alone, was not enough to explain the inequalities inherent in bureaucratic capitalism, which depend just as much on "status". Later thinkers, including French sociologist and public intellectual Pierre Bourdieu, endeavoured to examine the relationship between economic, cultural, and social capital. It is now recognised that a high level of cultural capital can coexist with low economic capital, as is often the case in the intellectual professions. The most recent studies on

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social stratification, such as the one conducted by Mike Savage et al. in the UK in 2013,[1] take into account the different combinations between these three forms of capital.

With regard to the difference between cultural and social capital, the former is embodied by the individual, mainly in their memory, but also objectivised in their possessions (books, clothes, etc.) and institutionalised in their titles. Social capital, in contrast, is attributed from the outside to the individual, engraved in the memory of other individuals or the relationships themselves. An individual cannot make much use of their cultural capital without objectivising, institutionalising, and then converting it into social capital; in other words, without it being recognised by society through institutional or reputational mediation. However, the individual can use their cultural capital to increase their social capital (for example, by succeeding in a government examination) and thereby access economic capital.

The logic of cultural capital has been at work since the dawn of the modern era and the development of public administrations and universities. The investment of economic resources in an individual's cultural formation in order to improve their condition is the mechanism of conversion and reconversion that governs social reproduction. It involves transforming one form of capital – material – into another – a capital of skills, relationships, and titles. The ultimate goal is to generate more capital than was invested at the beginning. The bureaucratisation of the modern world consequently has all the traits of "cultural capitalism". However, free universal education, guaranteed in France since 1881 and founded on principles inspired by the 1789 revolution, was supposed to even out this kind of inequality.

The question then is whether the same investment consistently generates the same return or whether other factors come into play. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron address this question in two well-known books published in 1964 and 1970 respectively: *Les Héritiers (The Inheritors)* and *La Reproduction (Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture)*. The two sociologists demonstrate that individuals enter the educational machine already endowed with the codes and skills they have absorbed from their environment. They leave this machine with greater expertise but without these initial differences evened out. Yet it is these gaps that determine the "distinction" between different sociocultural spheres, which in turn determines social and economic differences, as Bourdieu explained in 1979.[2] Individuals with more cultural capital at the start were able to leverage it more than those who had less. Things have not improved since. Is the promise of social mobility merely an illusion?

We cannot overestimate the role of education systems in our contemporary society. Schools and universities are there to transmit the shared elements of primary socialisation and the skills required by the economy based on a functional differentiation of tasks, as well as to bestow the titles that make it possible to assign duties to individuals. On the one hand, the system levels out; on the other, it distinguishes. However, the social and economic differences determined though education, which supersede natural differences, should be justified by merit. This is then the fourth fundamental function of the educational system: the justification of the social order.

When Bourdieu denounces the contradictions of the French republican education system, the stakes are high. Schools and universities make up a subsystem legitimising

1 Mike Savage, Fiona Devine, Niall Cunningham, et al. (2013). "A New Model of Social Class? Findings from the BBC's Great British Class Survey Experiment". *Sociology* 47(2), pp. 219-250.

2 Pierre Bourdieu (1979). *La Distinction*. Paris: Minuit.

the political and economic status quo. Absent this legitimisation, it is not certain whether the broader system could continue to operate. Does this educational subsystem guarantee equal opportunities? Bourdieu's conclusion can be summed up quite simply: in France, schools and universities do not play an equalising role. The initial differences observed when entering the system are still there upon exit. Thus, the education system achieves its three most obvious functions – socialisation, the transmission of skills, and the assignment of duties – but not the fourth. If this were true, and if it came to light, the entire liberal political and economic system, known in France as "the Republic", would be undermined.

In recent years, the debate on meritocracy has been gaining momentum. Authors such as Michael Sandel in the United States and David Goodheart in the United Kingdom have decried the unequal effects of professional selection processes, as well as their moral externalities: a lack of recognition, frustration, and class neuroses. Economists such as Robert H. Frank have analysed the dysfunctions of a "winner-takes-all society" that relies on the overaccumulation of intangible capital for the selection of its personnel. Thorstein Veblen identified and denounced this risk a century ago; Ibn Khaldun almost a millennium ago.

The conversion of cultural capital into economic capital is a complex, two-fold process. Firstly, educational institutions act as processors: they consume material wealth to produce intellectual wealth. But what translates this intangible wealth into hard cash is that there is a demand to be met. In the past, public administrations were eager to fill their ranks, and clients required the services of doctors and lawyers; today, it is the vast tertiary sector that absorbs enormous amounts of human capital.

Cultural capital investments can also result in a net loss: places in educational institutions are expensive, and people from less privileged contexts often find it more difficult to utilise their cultural capital. Moreover, the costs associated with its accumulation are only increasing, following an "arms race" logic. As a result, a mountain of sunk costs is being accumulated in order to finance a race of which the outcome is already known. A considerable amount of property, income, public and private expenditure, energy, and dreams, as well as of the planet's material resources, are consumed in this ritual that serves purely to justify the social order. It costs more and more to reproduce the world as it is.

Thus posed, the problem is far from merely being one of insufficient resources: an arms race cannot be resolved by stocking up on even more weapons. Increased spending would only lead to widened inequalities and inflated expenditure. As early as 1964, Bourdieu refused to even consider that the solution could be of an economic nature. If we wish to deal with the perverse mechanism of cultural capitalism, it must be defused. That means slowing down the race for distinction just as we regulate financial markets and road traffic. Ultimately, this means that public and private employers would have to deal with a greater level of uncertainty when selecting new employees. Post-productivist politics too will have to think more in terms of regulation than investment.

The massive accumulation of cultural capital is inseparable from an increase in collective expenditure and an erosion of the legitimacy of the system. Bourdieu's analysis thus reveals a deep fragility within the social order. Half a century after Bourdieu's first studies, are we ready to recognise the perverse logic of the race for cultural capital? If we are unable to imagine a better way of guaranteeing the functional differentiation of complex societies, we will have to resign ourselves to their collapse. ■

BENEDICT ANDERSON
Reimagined, Re-engineered, and Restored Communities

ARTICLE BY
EDOUARD GAUDOT

To build a narrative with the power to inspire a sense of allegiance, the power of education and the media must be harnessed. A tribute to the great scholar of "imagined communities", this essay evokes the challenges and opportunities presented by globalisation. It proposes a green reimagination of our sense of belonging anchored in our identity as global citizens and fostered by our educational establishments and creative industries.

As the dim light of post-ideological times fades, politics is increasingly called upon to produce overarching and comprehensive narratives. From providing a semblance of legitimacy to the contested neoliberal order to responding to the growing search for a sense of meaning in secularised, materialistic societies, "grand narratives" – as predicted by Peter Sloterdijk – are back.

First to come ashore on this rising historical tide were the remnants of the past. Weaving together abundance and freedom, modernist grand narratives of growth and nationhood are reviving the fury of the Steel Age as sovereign nations vie for access to resources.

In post-colonial, Islam-obsessed France, the national narrative revolves around discussions on the "*roman national*" and the dubious benefits of colonisation. For a jingoist United Kingdom, it evokes the buccaneering glory of Global Britain. In nationalist Poland and Hungary, it manifests as an aggressively revisionist political approach to memory and history in museums and schools. Concurrently, India, China, the United States, and Putin's Russia are all redeveloping their civilisational narratives in support of their soft power globally and as a justification for their hard power nationally.

Fed by the economic imbalances and cultural misgivings fostered by globalisation, a new generation of left-leaning populist movements has been gathering momentum over the past decade, attempting to form a discursive coalition based on a galvanising public narrative. However, these efforts were unable to reconcile the Left's old internationalism with the new

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normal of globalisation and lacked institutional underpinning. As a result, they were ultimately unstable alliances. In stark contrast, the right-wing project has tapped the deep well of nationalism, its institutions, and its forms of expression. Gradually shaping the whole public conversation, such efforts demand a streamlined national history celebrating grandeur and obscuring society's darker moments in order to strengthen and mobilise the national community. Shaking up the comfortable belief in the rationality of ruling elites, they solicit nostalgia, pride, and anger to conjure a powerful alternative narrative that is strongly nationalist in nature.

The author of arguably the most influential book on the origins of nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson (1936-2015) was a historian and political scientist as well as a devoted student of south-east Asia. Investigating the "origins and spread of nationalism", he famously defined it as "an imagined political community [...], imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign".[1] Against the cold-blooded realism of his contemporary Ernest Gellner, who saw nationalism as merely the instrument of the modern industrial state,[2] Anderson insisted upon the warmth, comfort, and solidity of a community held together by a shared creed, song and, more often than not, language: a Verdian "chorus of the slaves".

Through his work on language in relation to power, Anderson demonstrated the crucial historical role played by the media – especially the print media – and the schooling systems of modern states in imparting knowledge of the history, geography, and literature of a community in order to build a sense of belonging stronger than any other allegiance. This was the primary historical achievement of the Republican school: transforming France's conservative, predominantly peasant population into a community of French citizens, *enfants de la Patrie* ready to take up arms and die in muddy trenches.

After 70 years of European integration designed to forestall any resurgence of the nationalisms that led to the horrors of the past, Europe's nations have grown wary of the concept of patriotism, now relegated to football stadiums and the Eurovision Song Contest. But the EU has yet to put forward an equally compelling narrative about what it stands for, and there is no sense of the sacrifices Europeans as a whole might be willing to make in order to protect their "European way of life". This stands in clear contrast to the dedication with which Finnish citizens, for example, are prepared to defend their "imagined community".

In this context, especially following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and given the conflicting narratives surrounding it, Anderson's lessons are valuable and worthy of reflection – for Greens in particular. The existence of the modern nation-state and the extraordinary resilience of the emotional link it established with its populations is an everyday reminder of the power of education.

Over the years, the Green approach to a better world has evolved from whistleblowing

1 Benedict Anderson (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso Books.
2 Ernest Gellner (1983). *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

on environmental destruction to a technocratic portfolio of policies designed to address the ecological crisis. But both at national and European levels, Greens often struggle to identify the tone and substance of their own "imagined community". Lest they forget, schools have an important role to play in developing ecological awareness and this educational process continues through the broad diversity of media forms as a type of lifelong learning.

The Green role in developing a citizenry that identifies with and is able to bring about a better, safer, greener world must go far beyond election campaigning. It is a question of building up a Gramscian "eco-hegemony" – in schools and within public debate, in the world of trade and industry and within trade unions, and in organised civil society – that also touches the average person on the street.

For this, the Greens will have to overcome an important obstacle that has arisen since Anderson's times, marked as they were by the dominance of the printed press: the increasing division of the public sphere into ever-shrinking "imagined communities". An overhaul of the media ecosystem poisoning our minds and societies should become a priority as urgent and necessary as banning the fossil fuels and chemicals contaminating our air and food.

An opportunity presented by today's globalised, interconnected world is the possibility of extending our imagined communities to encompass the whole planet. As the war in Ukraine threatens to starve people in Africa and triggers fuel-related riots in Lima, Marshall McLuhan's "global village" is more real than ever.[3] From the Covid-19 pandemic to the geopolitical situation, a positive externality to these global crises is the fact that they pave the way for an "imagined community of planetary dimensions". With public opinion increasingly connected and mobilised, in addition to unprecedented levels of interdependency, it may be time for Green political discourse to reconnect with its alter-globalist roots, drawing on Anderson's lessons to forge a compelling narrative.

It is high time for education to instil a form of "Earth patriotism", a sense of belonging and devotion to the planet on which we live. This would not take the form of the ludicrous nationalism of Hollywood blockbusters that pit humanity against space invaders, but rather integrate the inclusive and democratic thinking of scientists and even sci-fi pioneers. Asimov's Gaia, the Spaceship Earth of Lovelock and Margulis, and Kim Stanley Robinson's Ministry for the Future, to name just a few, offer striking examples of such narratives.

How it might be possible to combine these elements to generate a sense of togetherness, of a shared common destiny, of belonging to an "imagined community", is still uncertain. What is certain, however, is that our schools and our creative and intellectual projects – from action movies to scientific essays – will be instrumental. It is time to take Anderson's legacy to the next stage. ■

3 Marshall Mcluhan & Bruce R. Powers (1992). *The Global Village*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

VEHICLES FOR INTEGRATION OR PLACES OF EXCLUSION?

MIGRATION AND ASYLUM IN EUROPE'S SCHOOLS

ARTICLE BY
FRANCESCA SPINELLI

As the final destination of increasingly chaotic and violent migration flows, the European Union must adapt its education systems if it wants to ensure the successful integration of millions of children. There is no shortage of recommendations, but on the ground, schools and teachers face severe difficulties and often insufficient resources. Five testimonies from across Europe shed light on the issues at stake.

Nadia Echadi still remembers the little Syrian girl who arrived alone in Belgium in 2016. At the time, Nadia, a primary school teacher, was co-running a homework class as part of the Citizens' Platform for Refugee Support, a volunteer movement set up in Brussels to support exiles abandoned to their fate by the authorities. The girl's parents, who were stranded in Turkey, had entrusted her to a lady to take her to Belgium, where an aunt lived. Despite this delicate situation, there was no appropriate follow-up at the school where the girl was enrolled, and she had received a bad school report. "This was not an isolated case; quite the contrary," says Nadia. "Other children showed us notes in their school reports that said: 'Didn't want to work', 'Chatters all the time', 'Is too agitated'. In the schools they attended, people hardly knew where they came from; their native language and background were ignored. These children were suffering from being uprooted; they were traumatised. Once in the classroom, they underwent new painful and abusive experiences, when in fact they should have been listened to, reassured, and cared for."

Schools in Europe seem largely overwhelmed by the arrival of children and young people with diverse immigration backgrounds.

FR

This article is available in French on the *Green European Journal* website.

RASSEMBLER DANS LA DIVERSITÉ, PROTÉGER CONTRE L'EXCLUSION : COMMENT DES ÉCOLES ACCUEILLENT LES JEUNES MIGRANTS ET RÉFUGIÉS
Francesca Spinelli explique pourquoi une société accueillante et inclusive commence à l'école.

Yet the arrival of non-native pupils is nothing new for European education systems, which are the responsibility of member states. The European Commission estimates that today "just under 10 per cent of all students learn in a language other than their mother tongue."[1] However, even in countries where reception arrangements have been in place for many years (since 1970 in France, for example), the situation on the ground remains problematic. The school system should be teaching the host language, fostering socialisation, and providing a safe haven. Yet it continues to suffer from shortcomings on all three fronts due to a lack of resources, staff, knowledge, and in some cases, willingness. As a result, rather than places of reception and community that act as a vehicle for integration, schools can become loci of exclusion and segregation.

At the European level, the European Commission and projects such as IMMERSE and ICAM have been producing reports and recommendations aimed at improving the capacity of schools to accommodate "children affected by migration" for years. Surveys of best practice reveal a wide disparity between European countries. Some initiatives, such as multilingual education (the provision of classes in the native languages of foreign-born children) and peer mentoring (pupils accompanying the integration of newcomers of the same nationality or culture), are spreading in schools. Their aim is to limit the isolation of pupils in separate classes and reduce the risk of dropping out to the greatest extent possible. The focus is also on training teachers in diversity and empowering diverse talents to join the profession. And because schools must be able to bring diverse people together, the methods they use to assess students' knowledge and skills should be flexible enough to adapt to different profiles and avoid reducing them to stereotypes.

In her 38 years of teaching, Anna Maria Picotti has been confronted with all these issues. She works at the IPSAS Aldrovandi Rubbiani vocational institute in Bologna, where about a third of the 1100 students have migratory backgrounds, accounting for a total of 44 nationalities. Some of them were born in Italy or arrived in the country at a very young age. Some do not speak the language of their parents and feel Italian but cannot obtain Italian nationality. It is an aberration that the bill on *Ius Scholae* currently being examined by the Italian parliament aims to correct. If approved, it would allow hundreds of thousands of young people born to foreign parents in Italy (or who arrived in Italy before the age of 12), and who have attended school for at least five years, to obtain Italian nationality and accompanying rights such as voting.

1 European Commission (2018). *Migrants in European schools: Learning and maintaining languages: Thematic report from a programme of expert workshops and peer learning activities (2016-17)*. Brussels: Publications Office.

A GATEWAY TO INTEGRATION?

For these young people, school could thus become the key to integration. But for those who arrived more recently, the challenges remain numerous. "All schools with foreign pupils offer Italian classes financed by the government and the local authorities," explains Anna Maria. "The problem is that they are usually held in the afternoon, after the school day is over. Some families don't want their daughters to come home too late, other pupils have to come home early to help their parents or to look after their siblings, and others live too far away."

For Nadia Echadi, the main problem is the lack of training and the unequal distribution of responsibilities among teachers. "When I started working, there were no classes in French as a foreign language in my school. But since I sometimes had non-native pupils, especially after the enlargement of the EU to eastern European countries, I started to think about how I could teach them French. For example, I made small dictionaries in all the languages, together with the children, which helped them enormously." Today Nadia develops pedagogical tools and activities to raise awareness and train teachers through two projects, Ergonomic Pédaconcept and Maxi-Liens.

Since 2019 in French-speaking Belgium, the FLA ("French as a learning language") scheme has helped to identify the needs of schools in terms of additional language lessons. "But we realised that we didn't have the qualified staff needed to give these lessons, nor the budget to pay them," says Nadia. The result is that FLA teachers are not trained, or are often ill, or have to replace class teachers who are off sick, "so the FLA course is no longer taught". However, Nadia says, "FLA teachers are very important; they often know the children better and can ensure contact with the families. In the current system, all the responsibilities fall on the class teachers, whereas they should be shared, especially with the FLA teachers."

In Bologna, Anna Maria describes a similar situation: when the school can count on additional resources – in this case, a language and cultural mediation service funded by the Emilia-Romagna region – the guidance received by pupils greatly improves. "The advantage is that the mediators, who are often young, are present regularly throughout the year and can therefore establish a relationship of trust with the pupils," she explains. "I am thinking, for example, of young Pakistani girls who confide their problems. Sometimes these are very serious, such as the risk of forced marriage." In other communities, families may be opposed to the prolonged schooling of children, and the role of mediators is crucial. "This is the case for young Roma and Chinese people, for whom obtaining the secondary school certificate (*terza media*) is already a lot, either because the girls have to get married or because they have to go to work and help their parents."

When children have a desire to learn, they must be prepared to go against their family. Sometimes schools even bend the rules to help them: "From the age of 18, young foreigners are theoretically not allowed to enrol in school," says Anna Maria. "They are supposed to attend an Italian course for foreigners and then adult education. But the director of our school, Teresa Pintori, has always accepted applications from young people over 18."

THE DESIRE TO LEARN

Parwana Amiri has been keen to get back to school ever since she fled Afghanistan with her family in 2018 at the age of 14. After spending a year in Turkey and more than two years in camps in Greece, the young refugee and activist was recently transferred to Germany with her family. Her schooling was suspended for four years, except for a brief period in Greece. Like her, many young asylum-seekers and refugees across the EU are being denied their right to education. "In Turkey I couldn't enrol in school," she says. "The day I arrived at Moria camp on Lesbos, I was told that I had to wait until I was transferred somewhere else before I could go to school. There were families who had been there for six months, a year. With other refugees, we started self-organised educational activities." It was during this period that Parwana started writing (she has since published two books, *The Olive Tree and the Old Woman* and *My pen won't break, but borders will*), and speaking out against conditions in the camp on social networks.

After the fire in Moria in September 2020, her transfer to a camp in Ritsona (86 kilometres north of Athens) led to a new disappointment: "I was told that I would have to wait at least six months to go to school. I was told that in the schools in the area there were not enough places for the 800 children in the camp. Another obstacle was transport. There was no money to pay for the bus." Finally, after a year and a half of waiting, Parwana was able to enrol in school with 600 other young people. But 200 children still did not have access to a primary school. From this experience, she draws two conclusions. "The time that children spend in camps without being able to go to school should be used to give them compulsory language classes, for six months at most!" And "teachers should be taught how to teach refugees."

Waiting is a word that often comes up in Parwana's stories, but also in those of Anna Maria, Nadia, and Nathalie Dupont. Since 2015, Nathalie has managed the Brussels-based Maximilien School for Adults with a team of 20 teachers and volunteers like herself. After several moves, the school is now located in the south-west of the city in the municipality of Forest. The lease is insecure, subsidies non-existent, and the building dilapidated, but

the school has become a meeting place for a varied clientele made up of asylum-seekers, undocumented migrants, and locals who attended little or no school.

Three times a week, classes are offered in French, English, Dutch, and IT. Apart from the importance of learning a common language as a tool for getting one's bearings and knowing one's rights, the classes offer "a place to meet people who are experiencing the same difficulties". In the same building, the SISA (Social and Administrative Information Service) helps people to submit their application for protection or regularisation. "Then the waiting begins," says Nathalie.

Months of waiting, sometimes years, during which people "don't have many official learning opportunities". Added to this, for asylum-seekers, is a difficulty related to the multilingual nature of Belgium: "They don't know which part of the country they will be placed in, and therefore which language to learn, whether French or Dutch will be useful to them later on." And the younger a person is when he or she arrives in Belgium, the more dangerous the wait: "We see mental and physical health problems developing, problems that then become chronic."

In Belgium, as in Greece, asylum-seekers are not always given access to school. "Families are placed in reception centres for asylum-seekers and the children are sometimes left out of school for several months, or even several years," says Nadia Echadi. "Sometimes the schools are too far away, and the problem of transport costs arises. There are also so-called 'elitist' schools, which 'sort' newcomer children when they enrol, simply claiming that there are not enough places." Yet, as Laetitia Van der Vennet, advocacy officer with PICUM (Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants), points out, all EU countries provide for at least nine years of compulsory schooling for all, including children with irregular status (although this is usually only implied). As a result, "many schools are confronted with some of the effects of migration policies and procedures that society at large may not see."

THE SCHOOL AS REFUGE

Children may miss school because they have an interview as part of their application for protection or regularisation, or because they have to accompany their parents who do not speak the language to appointments. Others leave school because of forced return.

In the Netherlands, for example, "several schools have developed programmes to pay tribute to these departing friends and to say goodbye to them," explains Laetitia. She also points out that in every EU country, there are regular protests by classes or schools against these expulsions. "What is in the best interest of

FOR UNDOCUMENTED CHILDREN, SCHOOL CAN EITHER BE A REFUGE FROM EXCLUSIONARY POLICIES, OR EXACTLY THE OPPOSITE

the child? Staying in the country with a residence permit? Or returning to the 'home country', even though the child may never have lived there? Settling somewhere else? Often EU member states do not consider this interest when making an expulsion decision. But if a child has lived for years in a country, has gone to school there, and has a network of friends, it should be in his or her interest to stay in that country."

Regularisation through schooling could one day enable schools to play their full role as vehicles for integration. But in the meantime, as President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen said in 2020, "We will make sure that those who have the right to stay are integrated and made to feel welcome."[2] For undocumented children, therefore, school can either be a refuge from exclusionary policies, or exactly the opposite. "In Cyprus, some schools inform the immigration services of the status of their pupils, who are then arrested," says Laetitia, who would like to see stronger firewalls against such denunciations throughout the EU.

RIGHTS ON PAPER ARE NOT ENOUGH

Nadia, Anna Maria, Nathalie, and Parwana also have aspirations. Nadia would like to see a genuine reception and support programme put in place for migrant and exiled children, "to enable them to begin their resilience process, to plan their future with confidence and to have a successful school career". Anna Maria would like to see more places where parents can meet and be welcomed, "because their isolation has a negative impact on the pupils". Nathalie would like the Belgian government to ensure that migrants are given support more quickly and comprehensively, "and that their skills are properly recognised". Parwana is apprehensive about her approaching 18th birthday, which could further hamper her education. When she was in Greece, an international school in Warsaw offered her a scholarship to complete

2 European Commission (2020). *Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027*. 24 November 2020. Brussels.

a two-year bachelor's degree. But when she arrived in Germany, she had to start her asylum procedure again and give up the scholarship. "I hope to find another opportunity here," she says. Her wait continues.

The exodus of millions of Ukrainians fleeing the war – more than 5.5 million by 1 May 2022, about half of whom are minors – has been a powerful reminder of the importance of ensuring a swift and comprehensive welcome for displaced people. For children, this means access to education. "Their return to school will help to alleviate their psychological stress, give them a sense of stability and normality and an outlook to the future," states the European Commission in the preface to its measures to support the schooling of Ukrainian children.[3] Access to education is a right of every child, regardless of their status. The activation of the Temporary Protection Directive for Ukrainians has not changed this.

But rights on paper are not enough. On the ground, all of Europe's schools must be able to count on the resources – financial and human – necessary to play their role as a nursery for future citizens. For the school system has a unique capacity to lay the foundations for a plural, open Europe, one that can see itself as the fruit of centuries of migration, cross-fertilisation, exchanges, and sharing. Against the efforts of certain governments to extend the hunt for the undocumented into schools, we must defend these spaces where the values of an inclusive and egalitarian EU are embodied by children every day. In this sense, the campaign for *Ius Scholae* – which in Italy faces obstruction by the far-right Lega and Fratelli d'Italia – could become a Europe-wide movement. A way of recognising the valuable, and underestimated, role played by so many teachers in welcoming and integrating young people. It would also be a way to allow these young people to shape – through the vote – their own future in the European Union.

3 European Commission. "Fleeing Ukraine: support for education". *Priorities 2019-2024*. Brussels.

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"WE CANNOT DELETE OUR WAY OUT OF THIS"

LEARNING IN THE MAZE

AN INTERVIEW WITH
JULIANE VON REPPERT-BISMARCK

Thanks to technology and the internet, today's children and young people have unprecedented access to information. While much online content is valuable and informative, there is also a great deal of compromised, biased, and untruthful information. Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck is the director of Lie Detectors, a journalist-led organisation seeking to help teenagers and pre-teens use the internet to enhance their learning, while avoiding the dangers of becoming ensnared in conspiracy theories or manipulation. She argues that media literacy should be an urgent priority for educators and policy-makers alike.

BEATRICE WHITE: What kind of information landscapes are school-children navigating today? How does this impact the way they learn?

JULIANE VON REPPERT-BISMARCK: The pandemic caused a lot of upheaval, not just because classes were suddenly taking place via video conferencing, but also because children were exposed to a lot of rumours and false information – as we all were – and so were unsure of what to believe. We also see this with the war in Ukraine, and previously we saw a lot of curiosity among children about the environment. Children have questions and concerns and want to understand what is happening. These worries are compounded because often they are not helped by their teachers to find their way in this information universe.

Disinformation affects children in a very different way to adults because they use different platforms. These days, children seek out information about the world from sources such as TikTok, Snapchat, and increasingly

Twitch and Discord. These aren't generally seen by adults as information sources: they're gaming platforms and live video platforms, and they are largely unmoderated, either because they are encrypted – with exchanges happening in small private chatrooms – or because the content is visual. Images and video are among the types of content that have always been the most difficult to moderate. So there is a generational dimension, in that children inhabit a different online world to their teachers. This can make it very difficult for teachers to approach the subject of disinformation.

So the issue goes beyond whether particular pieces of information are factually correct or incorrect; it's a question of the environment shaping our whole world view. Is this why Lie Detectors works specifically with young people?

Our organisation works with professional journalists to strengthen democracy using the tools of journalism. We currently work with more than 200 professional journalists from all kinds of media: broadcast, print, and online. The most visible part of our work is what we do in classrooms, speaking to children aged 10 to 15.

Those at the younger end of this age range in particular are incredibly open and enthusiastic about looking things up online; they are keen detectives who want to have the freedom to do research online, which they tell us doesn't happen often at school. They are also very enthusiastic about meeting real live journalists. By the time they're 14 or 15, they can sometimes be more difficult to work with because they're shyer and more self-conscious. But secondary school is a very important time because this is when they are forming lasting friendships and social groups, and also their world views. It is when they start thinking deeply and making decisions about where they stand on particular issues.

In our view, it is really important to intervene early, and there are initiatives that start with children as young as four years old. On average, 10- to 11-year-olds regularly use three platforms, and the older ones are on up to five platforms. So they are much more adept at using these technologies than their teachers, but they often don't understand the full extent of their engagement and can't see that they may be trapped in an information silo. Also, very often they don't use reliable sources of information. If you ask a schoolchild where they get information from, very often the answer will be "Instagram" or "WhatsApp". You then have to tell them that these are photo or messaging apps and explain the difference between how they operate and how journalism works. It's about understanding the difference between the content on these platforms – which is entirely subjective and sometimes

CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY NEEDS TO BE RECOGNISED AS A CORE LITERACY ALONGSIDE READING, WRITING, AND NUMERACY

manipulative – and that produced by journalists, which might not always get it right but is certainly more reliable.

The way we talk about this issue is very important. Yes, there are dangers we need to be wary of, but it's important to emphasise that so many precious treasures and so much valuable information can be found online. We need to seek out what is good. It's a bit of a yin-and-yang approach. Nonetheless, all the journalists of the world are not going to be able to solve this problem, so what we are also doing, increasingly, is training the teachers.

What are the main shortcomings in how the current education system deals with this issue? Is it simply a question of catching up with the technology or is there a need to instil a more critical approach?

Teachers' confidence in their own ability to do something about media literacy is not at the level it should be. Almost 100 per cent of teachers say that this subject is relevant to their class, but only 30 per cent have actually addressed it in the classroom. That is a really significant gap. So there needs to be training for teachers regardless of subject area, and we need to provide them with incentives. It should become part of all teachers' approaches to their subjects, whether they teach biology, politics, art, or maths.

In addition, some schools in more deprived areas have very poor connectivity and access to facilities and equipment to get online, so practical access is an important barrier. There is also a lack of suitable materials. It can't always be a conversation about refugee rights or religious tolerance. You have to catch the kids where they are, on the platforms they use, and actually talk about things that they care about. It's not about immediately tackling the hardest issues; it's about teaching kids to flex their critical-thinking muscles so they can use them when they need to. It doesn't matter if they train them on crazy stories circulating online, like the one about the man who allegedly married his

pet cobra – a discussion that tends to generate great enthusiasm in most classrooms!

Because they are unfamiliar with the information universe that children inhabit, teachers actually need to learn to ask questions. This process cannot be only frontal and didactic. It's a universe that is developing incredibly rapidly, so we need to meet children where they are and be able to engage them regardless of their backgrounds.

We also need to make sure these discussions are conducted in a responsible way that keeps teachers safe. Bringing up controversial subjects can be a risk, as we saw with the tragic case of the teacher killed in France in relation to a discussion about cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad. An extreme example but, especially when you start looking at conspiracy theories, you have to keep teachers safe and make sure they know how to approach these questions in a light-hearted way.

What structural changes would you like to see to bring media literacy into schools?

If you're going to be piling things onto the curriculum, you really have to make sure that teachers are being incentivised in the right way. One of the big grading systems for schools is the PISA rankings. They are currently thinking about adding critical media literacy as one of the indicators used to gauge a school's performance. What we say is that critical media literacy needs to be recognised as a core literacy alongside reading, writing, and numeracy. Because without it, you cannot make sense of the world. It doesn't matter how well you can read words if they don't make sense to you.

We also really need to be able to measure the effects of media literacy programmes so we can guarantee that politicians are going to put their political and financial capital behind them.

In recent years social media platforms have stepped up their efforts to stem disinformation, for example through content warnings and fact-checking. How do you view these efforts?

We think the "information disorder" problem needs to be tackled on the demand side, because the reason that it exists is the demand at a human level. If we can curb this demand, then it might not be as interesting to put out the manipulative information we see at the

moment. However, there's also the supply side. And by supply side, I don't mean foreign actors such as Russian or Chinese trolls; I actually mean the drivers of disinformation. Platforms have to become accountable for their algorithms and the way in which they prioritise polarising content.

There is good reason to be sceptical of the large internet platforms and the solutions they offer. We have seen this for many years: Facebook hires 1000 new fact-checkers, and it still doesn't solve the problem. There has been a focus on content moderation, fact-checking, and using artificial intelligence to move or remove harmful content. The problem is that when you start deleting content, this often leads to accusations of censorship – real or perceived – which is harmful, both for democracy and for the credibility of politicians. You only have to look at the German Facebook Act[1] to see what kind of backlash can arise. We cannot delete our way out of this.

At the EU level, the Digital Services and Digital Markets Acts will give the EU very powerful antitrust tools, so it's important to get that right. Correct application, privacy, the limit to behavioural data collection: these are essential questions over the long term for curbing disinformation. But there have been intensive lobbying efforts, and the process has been very lengthy. Commitment and resilience will be needed on the side of policy-makers to see it through to the end.

Increasing numbers of people distrust established media. Should we be seeking to restore trust in certain sources? It has also been argued that the impulse to "deconstruct" information and narratives can lead to cynicism and a loss of respect for facts and objectivity. Is this as a risk?

Yes of course. We've heard teenagers say, "I don't believe anything except for what my friends tell me." We've got deep fake fatigue, which makes people just give up. And that's the worst, when people don't believe anything anymore. So yes, there is a lot of disinformation out there, but the good news is that there are practical tools that we can give children and young people – and also adults – so they do not feel helpless. All you need is a basic journalist approach. It's not magic; we simply ask questions. "Who wrote this?" "What is the source?" "What do we know about the person writing this?" "Why might they be writing this?" And there are also questions to ask yourself: "Why am I reading this?" "Why do I want to believe this?" "Is this confirming something I want to believe because it makes the world more understandable to me?"

1 Germany's Network Enforcement Act, or "NetzDG" law, aims to combat hate speech and disinformation online by forcing platforms to rapidly remove illegal content or face heavy fines. (Source: Centre for European Policy Studies)

WE ARE ULTIMATELY TELLING CHILDREN AND TEACHERS TO SLOW DOWN, TO CONSUME INFORMATION MORE DELIBERATELY

This is something children have no problems understanding. When you get to the ultimate outcomes of manipulation, propaganda, or lying, they can understand it, because they know all about cyberbullying. They have a very innate understanding of the online world that a lot of adults don't have, because they all follow YouTubers, memes, and popstars. Even with just an image or a catchy headline or a video, you can make a lot of money and influence people's opinions, positively or negatively. When you move that gaze from their online world into the world of information, you can do a lot.

What are the risks for democracy if we don't take this issue seriously?

The threats to democracy are incredibly clear. Just look at the questions millions of people were asking during the pandemic: about whether masks really work, about the risks of vaccines, about whether remedies like gargling garlic water would cure Covid-19. That shows that disinformation can really mess with a person's ability to make informed decisions. If you are not able to tell true from false online, that can stop you making an informed decision. And informed decision-making is the basis of the democratic process. If that is undermined, then the entire democracy is undermined.

What is the best thing that could happen? From our point of view, media literacy needs to be seen as a right for children, and must become engrained in the thought processes of both teachers and students. And teachers need to lose their fear. We've seen it happen; we've seen the debates that can happen in classrooms. We've also seen children correcting teachers in the classroom, or heard about them questioning their parents at home, as a result of this work. These tools can be incredibly empowering.

Young people today face great uncertainty about the future and are exposed to alarming and confusing information about issues such as war and the climate crisis. It can often be tempting to look away from reality. Can media literacy empower young people in the face of such challenges?

In the past you would go to a newsstand or a newsagent and there would be a choice between either broadsheets or tabloids. You'd buy a broadsheet for reliable information on serious topics, or sometimes you might choose a tabloid for its sensational stories about UFOs and alien landings because you wanted some light entertainment. After all, not everything has to be a matter of life or death. What matters for children today is being able to tell the difference, to make a conscious choice.

We have to train our eyes and those of the next generation to see and understand that difference and to know when it really matters to use that knowledge. We are ultimately telling children and teachers to slow down, to consume information more deliberately. Share more sparingly and stop and think before you do. And also to abandon or resist the temptation to see everything in black and white; to realise that there is so much to be found in the grey middle. It might take longer to explore this messy middle where all the information overlaps – it's difficult, it's nuanced – but it's a really promising and interesting space where you can learn so many important things. ■

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STRUGGLES IN THE UNIVERSITY

Coordinated by
JENNIFER KWAO

Throughout history, universities have been birthplaces of new ideas and movements. In the late 20th century, student movements such as that of May ’68 shook the world and reshaped society for generations. Today, universities continue to play their critical role as laboratories for social and political change, but their capacity to do so is waning. Between government control and the pressures of cuts, fees, and precarity, many students and academics are on the back foot.

This panorama brings together the voices from movements in and around the university. We hear from representatives of campaigns to keep students out of debt in the Netherlands, oppose chronic student housing shortages in Hungary, and demand a decolonised education in Belgium, as well as academics resisting worsening working conditions in the UK. Their experiences reveal an ongoing struggle to stand up for the emancipatory promise of education and reach out beyond the walls of its institutions to build a better society.

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THE NETHERLANDS' "BAD LUCK GENERATION"

At exactly 23:37 on 20 January 2015, the Dutch government made a decision that would affect students for years to come. It abolished the basic grant system that allowed students to study without incurring major debts, replacing it with a grant-based system that only financed students from low-income households. The grant had a catch: repayment was required if a student did not graduate within 10 years. All other students would need to rely on their parents or take out a loan (on which the government charges interest). The government promised to use the money saved by this decision to fund improvements in the Dutch higher education system. With its budget cuts between 2015 and 2022, however, the government effectively broke its promise.

Around 2019, an outcry from students spurred research into the effects of the new loan system. Research found that the number of students with debt had tripled. Students from middle-income backgrounds were found to have comparatively greater financial problems than those from a low-income or high-income background.

More than half of students from middle-income backgrounds are worried about their future finances. With mounting debt and the average price for a house at half a million euros and rising, home ownership is increasingly out of young people's reach. Not only are they priced out of the market, the Dutch government has also made it impossible for them to borrow money to buy a home: in 2021, the government retracted its pledge to enable young people to hide their debt from banks and mortgage lenders.

Most students were never in favour of the loan system and anticipated many of the problems it has since created. The National Student Union (LSVb) has organised around the issue since 2012. However, their campaign #NietMijnSchuld (not my debt/fault) with the youth trade union branch FNV Young & United only took off in 2019 after the effects of the loan system became difficult to ignore. Between 2015 and 2019, a growing number of students filed troubling complaints with these student-led organisations.

The #NietMijnSchuld campaign had three demands: reinstating the basic grant system and abolishing the loan system; fair compensation for all students who suffered as a result of the loan system; and new investments to improve higher education. To further their cause, the campaigners organised protests, petitions, sit-ins, spammed the student debt collector with small payments, and wrote to officials.

In 2022, the new government coalition finally responded: the loan system would be abolished and the basic grant system reinstated. The government also earmarked 1 billion euros to compensate students who studied between 2015 and 2022. Students were pleased to hear the news but felt that at 1000 euros per student, the level of compensation was insufficient, especially as student loans average 24,000 to 28,000 euros for four years of studies.

To highlight their dissatisfaction student unions organised a protest on 4 February 2022. Government officials and certain party leaders also came to show their support. Although the protest reignited debates in the House of Representatives, changes to the 1 billion budget are yet to materialise.

After many broken promises and superficial changes, students understandably feel that the government has failed them. Although progress has been made and future students can expect a basic grant as of 2023, those who studied from 2015 to 2022 will always feel like the "bad luck generation". ■

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CONNECTING STUDENT HOUSING WITH THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY IN HUNGARY

In June 2021, 10,000 people marched through Budapest to protest against government plans to build a campus for China's Fudan University. Some carried signs reading "treason", while Budapest's Green mayor, Gergely Karácsony, denounced the government's decision as "the final and complete moral suicide of Fidesz" in a speech at the protest. The government was effectively breaking its promise to build a "Student City" for the sake of a project funded by Chinese loans, and public outrage was palpable. The march was the first large-scale anti-government action after a year of strict Covid-19 rules, and it took place at a time when China's human rights abuses were earning it strong rebukes from the EU.

Young people, who have the most to lose from the government's broken promise, were strongly represented at the march. Students are increasingly forced into the primary housing market or into paying exorbitant rents to private landlords because of a shortage of appropriate accommodation, and Budapest's housing supply cannot keep up with demand. The planned Student City project was therefore a welcome change. Beyond providing new accommodation, cultural, and sports facilities, as well as public transport networks, for approximately 8000 students, the project was expected to push rents down across the city, reducing living costs not only for young people and the families that support them but also city residents in general.

Szikra (Spark), the political movement behind the protests, struck a chord with students and the opposition. While the liberal mainstream media highlighted the national security risks of hosting a Fudan campus within the EU, and some even raised racist concerns about Chinese people gaining influence in the country, Szikra framed the issue in terms of the material consequences for Hungarians. We chose to highlight the government's hypocrisy, as it would rather be indebted to China than provide affordable housing to thousands of young people moving to Budapest from across the country for their studies. This became a rallying cry for the opposition ahead of the April 2022 elections. A referendum bid on housing proposed by the opposition parties and spearheaded by Karácsony and then-parliamentary candidate András Jámbor gathered 200,000 signatures. However, on 18 May 2022, the Constitutional Court threw out the referendum bid. This decision was made on a political basis and leaves the opposition without any legal means to appeal.

Students and teachers have tried but largely failed to make their voices heard in the last 12 years of Fidesz government. Their appetite for radical action and deep organising in the educational sector is understandably increasing. This spring, for example, hundreds of teachers were on a rolling strike, most of them participating in "wild strikes" which, under Fidesz-introduced laws, means sacrificing their wages and risking their jobs. Szikra takes this as a further sign that people want to exercise democratic control over their lives.

If the government refuses to compromise, Szikra will continue to fight for the Student City project. We believe that the lack of funding for public schools, low teacher wages, and the ideological control of teaching materials are issues that cannot be divorced from Hungary's political crisis. With our campaigns, we hope to show Hungarians that if they organise, they can challenge the Fidesz hegemony, even when the political alternative seems to have collapsed after the 2022 parliamentary elections. ■

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DECOLONISING BELGIUM'S OLDEST UNIVERSITY

After the death of George Floyd and the wave of Black Lives Matter protests reached Belgium in 2020, the Belgian government convened a commission to examine Belgium's colonial past. For decades, Black communities and organisations in Belgium have been advocating for this commission. Ministers and local politicians have since held discussions on teaching Belgium's colonial history more extensively in schools as well as on decolonising museums and public spaces, many of which are populated by statues of King Leopold II.

The campaign #DecolonizeKULeuven puts this challenge to the Catholic University of Leuven (KU Leuven) – Belgium's oldest university and one of Europe's most prestigious educational institutions. It is run by Undivided, a student-led organisation that focuses on gender, decolonisation, anti-ableism, and supporting LGBTQI+ students. Alongside other relatively new African student associations in Belgium's universities, Undivided advocates for the overdue reckoning with academia's colonial past. The #DecolonizeKULeuven manifesto launched in 2021 sets out a roadmap for decolonising the university. Its 10 demands cover issues such as Eurocentrism in curricula; KU Leuven's participation in Belgium's colonial past in Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi; and the precarious position of cleaners and other university support staff

The campaign is one student-led action within Undivided's broader work. Since its founding in 2018, the group has organised lectures, panel discussions, documentary screenings, and protests. The platform also advocates for the wellbeing of LGBTQI+ students of colour. Its gender justice agenda involves making sure that the university responds to instances of homophobia or transphobia and advocating for a racial justice approach to the university's gender equality policy.

As of 2019, only 30 per cent of KU Leuven professors were women. While the university does not collect data on the ethnicity and racial origin of its staff, it is clear to us as students that these are almost exclusively white women. Undivided believes that the university doesn't just need more women faculty members, but also more women from lower socio-economic backgrounds and different ethnicities to reflect the society we live in.

Our experience of organising as students at the university started off positively. From 2018 to the summer of 2021, the university funded Undivided as they deemed its work vital. We were also invited to take part in KU Leuven's Diversity Council, which was an opportunity for our criticisms to be heard and influence the council's long-term policies. Eventually, the university rejected our criticism and approach, which centred on decoloniality and intersectionality. In addition to withdrawing funding, the chancellor of the university branded Undivided as "woke" and indicative of "cancel culture" that "threatens academic freedom of thought".

This pushback threatens to stifle representation of students from minority communities, which has long been absent at the university. Despite the opposition, Undivided continues to put the challenge of decolonisation and intersectionality to KU Leuven. We are striving for an academia that sheds its pretence of neutrality and rejects the West as the sole point of departure for knowledge. ■

NOZIZWE DUBE

is a law graduate of KU Leuven. As a student, she was the coordinator of Undivided for KU Leuven and co-founder of Karibu – African Circle Leuven (a student association for students of African descent).

UK ACADEMICS CAMPAIGNING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

UK academics have been engaged in industrial action against pension cuts, the increased casualisation of university staff, and the gender and racial pay gap since 2017. At Goldsmiths, we have also been engaged in a struggle to make the university more democratic, accountable, and inclusive. This local movement consists of the trade and student unions as well as other collectives of staff and students. We have deployed a number of strategies for our cause: formulating proposals, for instance, on alternative governance models; developing alternative community fora involving staff, students, and members of the local community; and the occupation by students of Deptford Town Hall (Goldsmiths' main administration building) for four and a half months in 2019 to push for racial justice reforms.

Our key demands are fairly straightforward, but they require a radical overhaul of local management, the university sector, and government policy. We envision a public education system that is unencumbered from market logics and open to everyone who wants it, and that fosters critical thought. While the university has never been entirely inclusive nor egalitarian, important reforms allowed more people access to higher education. Unfortunately, with the expansion of neoliberalism this opening up has been turned into a profit-generating opportunity. Students are seen as income sources, while degrees have become consumer items and university workers endlessly exploitable and expendable. And with everything valued in terms of its capacity to generate money, much of the arts and humanities are treated as pointless and starved of investment. We want this to stop.

We're not seeking special treatment for academics. We simply want to highlight the erosion of decent basic working, pay, and pension conditions. We believe this situation is further evidence of the growing divide between the very rich minority and the increasingly impoverished majority.

The administration has responded negatively. At every level we have been belittled, derided, and put down by people who build careers as university managers and consultants but who themselves do not teach or conduct academic research. Despite having much more material and structural power, they try to discredit us by portraying us as elitist academics refusing to give up privilege.

In reality, many of us – particularly those of us from ethnic minority and working-class backgrounds, women, and other marginalised groups – have not experienced this supposed privilege. We have come up through an academia that has exploited our labour, kept us on precarious contracts, worked us harder in ever-tougher conditions, and blamed us when poor management produces impoverished institutions.

This situation has not just led many of us to despair; it has also made us more willing to take drastic action (including extended strike action) because we feel we have nothing left to lose.

The university is failing to deliver social justice. In addition to expanding access and cultivating critical thinking, the university needs to reflect on its blind spots and privilege and on its role in making the world a better place. Through a project entitled New Social Imaginaries, a small international collective is exploring ways to do this work beyond the existing institutions. ■

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ON THE OUTSKIRTS
THE GEOGRAPHY OF EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY

PHOTO ESSAY BY
SOFIA CHERICI &
FEDERICO AMBROSINI

Life in Via dell'Archeologia in Tor Bella Monaca on the outskirts of Rome is marked by institutional disinterest and the autarchic microcosm that is the neighbourhood's underground economy. For years, the local school was plagued by high dropout rates and difficult teaching conditions. But the arrival of new leadership showed a different way of teaching, capable of defusing local tensions and reactivating social mobility. The experience stands out as a reminder of how schooling is at once a cause of and a potential answer to Europe's spatial inequalities.

IT

This article is available in Italian on the *Green European Journal* website.

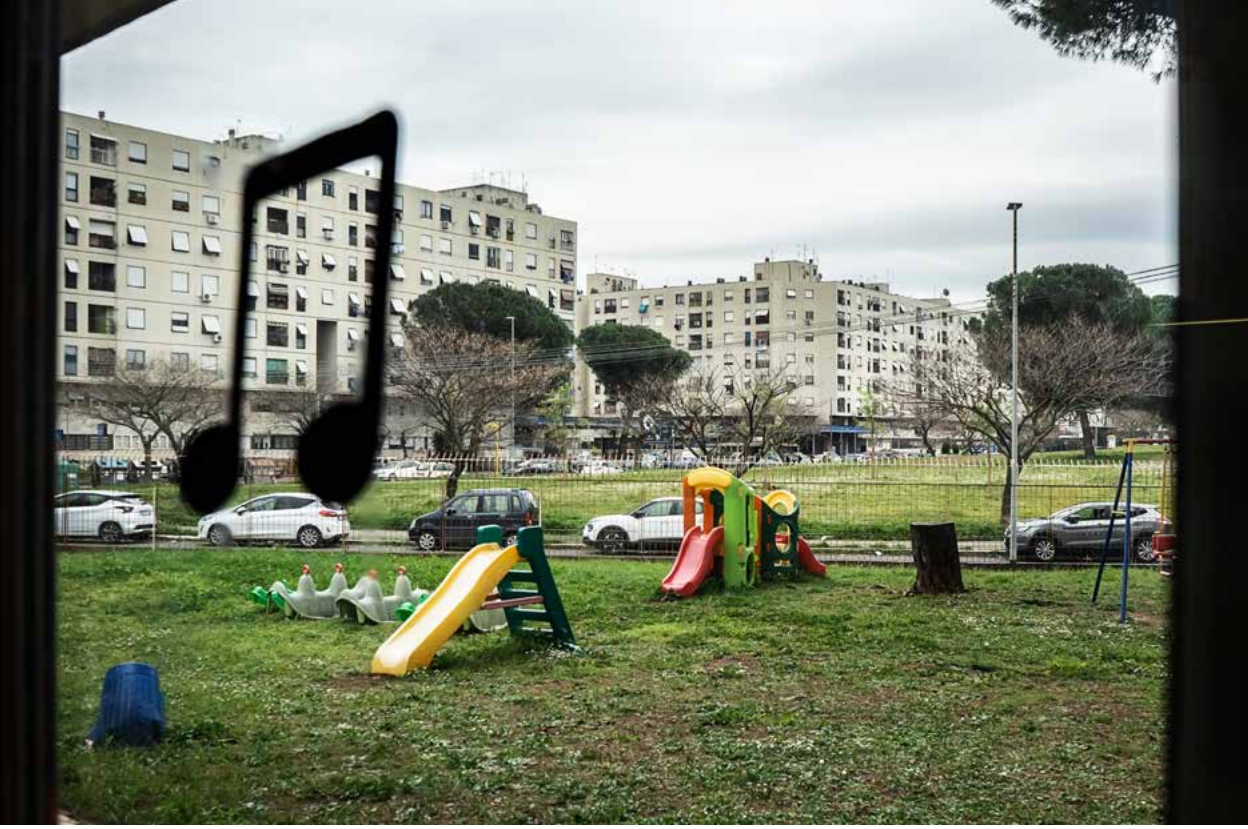
TOR BELLA MONACA, GEOGRAFIA DELLA DISEGUAGLIANZA EDUCATIVA

Sofia Cherici e Federico Ambrosini visitano la periferia di Roma per capire come scuole e insegnanti possono trasformare la comunità che li circonda.

It took three hours to clean the window. Three hours to remove the encrustation of 20 years of neglect that had built up between the bars and the opaque glass.

After three years and sixteen shopping trolleys full of discarded books, the messy old room with its dirty windows has finally returned to life as a school library. Now the books are catalogued. From its windows, you can see the towering rows of social housing that stand out on Via dell'Archeologia in Tor Bella Monaca.

Located in the east of Rome on the far side of the Grande Raccordo Anulare ring road, Tor Bella Monaca is one of Europe's many peri-urban spaces that exist as enclaves of inequality. Built on land occupied illegally during Italy's post-war construction frenzy, today it is a strip of land into which the tentacles of the urban economy still reach but the where attention and resources of city government are diluted, if not absent.



The social housing blocks of Via dell'Archeologia, in Tor Bella Monaca, from a window of the Melissa Bassi Institute.

The cluttered concrete of public housing represents 82 per cent of residential buildings in the neighbourhood, the highest density in Italy. The area is well known for criminality linked to drug trafficking. On Via dell'Archeologia, the main street for dealing, it is estimated that drug profits reach around 600,000 euros a month. This thriving clandestine economy meets the needs of a neighbourhood lacking other options, with unemployment rates much higher than the capital's average.

The only institutional centre in the triangular space formed by the two parts of Via dell'Archeologia is the Istituto Comprensivo "Melissa Bassi", a complex of colourful buildings with a poorly maintained garden and a small library with recently cleaned windows.

Currently, the school has 720 children – spanning early years, primary, and lower secondary– most of whom are from the neighbourhood. They are the youth of Via dell'Archeologia, an area where there are more children than adults. Their restless life invades the school environment. Between the rows of multi-storey tower blocks, school and children share a destiny intertwined with the dynamics of the neighbourhood.

An outdoor lesson in an area of the school's garden that students helped renovate.

THE CLOSED ROAD

Tor Bella Monaca is characterised by irregular streets and a built environment that rises upwards in tower blocks. Less than two kilometres from the Melissa Bassi Institute, there is a large, squat structure with a colonnade at the entrance: the Liceo Scientifico Linguistico Amaldi. This secondary school is considered to be one of the best in the Lazio region, despite its location.

Emiliano Sbaraglia, who teaches literature at Melissa Bassi, experienced the quality of teaching at Amaldi first-hand during his years as a supply teacher: "The difference is big, especially in terms of preparation and from a didactic point of view. It annoys me to think that there's not even a couple of kilometres between us. Why do things work there and not here?" He is a middle-aged man with fingers covered in large rings and a grizzled head; a calm figure who has become a reference point for many at the school.

"Our students who go there are treated as if they are going to fail because they don't have the necessary basic skills. We try to fight this prejudice, but it's also partly true," explains Emiliano as his car rolls along the row of whitish apartment blocks of Via dell'Archeologia. "Here's why: it's this road."

In Tor Bella Monaca, public and private urban planning are subservient to the trafficking culture. The alcoves of buildings and hidden streets designed in the social housing boom of the 1980s now host a self-sufficient modular economy. Despite repeated raids, the lifts in drug-infested towers are blocked to use as warehouses for goods, while terraces remain strategic lookout points.

In the school car park, Emiliano traces the invisible border of this self-managed microcosm with his fingers: "Continuing towards the entrance to the motorway," he explains, "there is the Rome-Naples connection that in two hours takes you to the heart of Italy's drug trade, the Neapolitan district of Scampia." A bridge that defines and shapes neighbourhood life.

AN OPEN SCHOOL

Teaching in institutions like Melissa Bassi can be a political choice. Before applying for the transfer, Emiliano had started as a teacher at a middle-class school in Frascati, a quiet town to the south of Rome. It was two hundred metres from the house where he was born and raised and next to the football pitch where he played as a centre forward.

"I asked for a transfer to come here. I chose this school because here, I feel useful." Emiliano is not the only one to teach at Melissa Bassi by choice. This often makes the difference: "Until a few years ago I was very critical of teachers who, upon arrival, asked for a transfer. Then I realised that not everyone is inclined to teach in such a context."

The institute has changed a lot since 2011 when Emiliano first joined Melissa Bassi with Save The Children to set up improvised radio studios in classrooms. The school suffered from years of temporary administration. There was no permanent headteacher and the role was filled by the heads of other institutions who often lacked the time or dedication to manage the complexities of such a school. "Many headteachers weren't very present, and when they were, it was as if they weren't there," says Emiliano.

After several substitutes, in 2019 Alessandra Scamardella took on the post and gave the school and its faculty a new presence. Now her office door is open to everyone three days a week, including families.

"The stability given by the new management and some new educational approaches rebuilt the area's confidence in the educational institution," Alessandra explains. "Here, parents must be supported, invited, called: the formula of the virtual open day doesn't work like in other schools… We are perpetually behind schedule and parents must be chased up. That's why we also try to involve them, for example, in computer literacy programmes."

The school touches all areas of public life in the area, and so the new impulse brought together institutions, local bodies, and the community. For the first time in years, there was the possibility of a different relationship between public bodies and the community in this generally overlooked neighbourhood.

"In collaboration with the Fondazione Paolo Bulgari [a philanthropic foundation focused on poverty and educational inequality], we are organising a social support centre that operates at least once a month to ensure synergy between public institutions and associations," explains Scamardella. These initiatives also arise out of the need to help the local community out of its isolation and assist people in discovering the world that exists beyond the limits of Via dell'Archeologia.

Even the interiors of Melissa Bassi have changed to accommodate the new dynamics and teaching models. Spaces lost over the years are being recovered under the guidance of the new administration. Some rooms were previously cluttered with rubbish and old furniture, while others had been occupied for personal use. The institute is immense. It has large classrooms and murky hidden areas that had been abandoned in the careless succession of substitute administrators and a climate of general indifference.

"There were some unknown rooms, locked, maybe because the janitor had taken over the space. How can you get away with occupying public spaces?" asks Marco Fusco, head of art and drawing, while he sits in the new art workshop set up with the help of students. It is a recently renovated classroom space, in a room with blue walls and yellow radiators that is now full of sketches and drawings.

Like the art room, today many spaces have been reclaimed for the school and community. Until a few years ago, even what is now the large staff room, with painted walls and a view of the inner courtyard, was a carpentry shop. In the meantime, a street art workshop has been set up in another space under the care of the ColorOnda social project. Next door, a classroom is given over to the Museo delle Periferie (Museum of the Outskirts). Yet another became the music laboratory.

As if asserting its place in the autarchic system that is Via dell'Archeologia, the school is repainting its walls, building convivial spaces, and weaving ties with the local community. In sum, it is creating a space that can offer an alternative existence for the area. But beyond its walls, life on the hard concrete forces another, harsher sense of belonging on the students.

NEIGHBOURHOOD LEGACIES

Maira [name changed] has not been seen at school since she turned 17 last January. You can find her across the road in the desolation of the

Marco Fusco, head of art and drawing at Melissa Bassi. Marco's students are reclaiming disused spaces in the school, transforming this once-abandoned classroom into an art laboratory.

empty spaces between buildings and in the half-light of the bottlenecks that run through them.

Maira's path has been determined by a neighbourhood life beyond her control. She was left wandering from house to house alone while her parents were in jail and was subsequently removed from the custody of her grandfather after a visit from the social services. "What can you do… You can hardly blame Maira?" Emiliano asks himself.

Emiliano has been chasing Maira through the labyrinths of Via dell'Archeologia for at least three years. Maira is only halfway down the list. The class Emiliano teaches is a faithful reproduction of statistics: "We are among the worst in Italy for early school leavers. The average at Melissa Bassi is 19 per cent, compared to the European average of 10 per cent and the national average of 13 per cent. Four out of eighteen students dropped out, a perfect average. In eight years, there have been too many." In the face of the lingering school losses, today a group of teachers offers support to students at risk of dropping out, working in cooperation with regional health units and social services.

But the early school leavers of Melissa Bassi are not isolated cases: they are snapshots that recall the data of certain rural schools in France or the social

The school garden. With the help of local associations, the new management is giving the school's spaces a new lease of life.

segregation of the Parisian *banlieue*, where a centralised education system has produced a gulf in teaching quality and resources between the outskirts and rich neighbourhoods, between countryside and city. The result is a system split in two, which fails in its role as a social elevator and condemns new generations based on where they come from.

Around the world, spatial disparities undermine the social and economic hopes of entire generations. In London, the social mobility index is among the highest in England. Meanwhile, England's countryside, its rugged coastlines, and the country's old industrial centres are paralysed: only 10 per cent of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in the southern coastal towns of Hastings and Eastbourne go to university, compared with 50 per cent in London's upmarket neighbourhoods of Chelsea and Kensington.

Education should be one of the main drivers of redistribution, especially primary and secondary education. But as is often the case, the neighbourhoods that need it most are also those where quality teaching and school services are lacking. For many, the first inequality is access to quality education. In Tor Bella Monaca, the hope is that schooling can prevent the heavy territorial heritage from dragging new generations down.

"How can these young people be convinced? In the days of the temporary administration, I would pick them up on the street and tell them to go back to school because they had not been seen for maybe two weeks, but they would reply, "If even the headteacher doesn't go to school, why should I? I earn 150 euros a day out here." Left with nothing to say, I would go back to school," says Emiliano. "But now I have something to say because the school has adopted a totally different approach."

POLITICALLY SIDELINED

In the succession of floors and corridors at Melissa Bassi, there is the impression of a school that is only half full. Walking through the library, Emiliano speaks of a haemorrhage of students: "In 2011, we had classes from section A up to E, all full. But with the years of substitute heads, the school started to live day by day and enrolments fell. If they drop further, we run the risk of being merged into another school complex. It would be a great loss because, here on Via dell'Archeologia, we are the only institutional stronghold."

After years of falling enrolment, the change in management stemmed the losses and now student numbers are starting to increase. The difference was made at Melissa Bassi by a more active and select teaching staff that brought meaning to their classroom hours. While the role of teachers remains critical, it is the ability to adapt teaching methods to context – as well as greater access to resources and services – that makes education systems more equitable. These elements often lie beyond the competence of each school so flexibility should also be framed in a structured national approach – you cannot always rely on some sort of enlightened leadership.

Tor Bella Monaca is also a peripheral suburb in the sense of institutional politics. Although the neighbourhood is recognised as a "risk area" in terms of its educational needs, further centralisation into the institutional machine of education policy is not a good fit to the social rifts that many schools find themselves mending.

"At the national level, there is no real autonomy for the organisation of school administrative departments, a fundamental factor in managing aspects such as the appointment of senior personnel and the filling of administrative vacancies. Then there is the problem of the number of teachers per class, which often fails to take into consideration an institution's specific situation. Bureaucracy, which is not always the problem and which in any case must be respected, imposes conditions that do not take into account the specific problems experienced by individual schools. Internal management doesn't matter when things are imposed from the top down," explains Scamardella.

Children on their way to musical and creative activities.

IN THE HANDS OF PROSELYTISM

Emiliano is sitting between the benches in the library. “In eight years of teaching at this school, I have come to realise that I know nothing. You must live in the neighbourhood 24 hours a day to understand what it means to live here.”

In the library, French windows open onto the courtyard of one of the school’s many secondary entrances. Emiliano hopes that one day, it can become the entrance to a new library for the local area. “If I know one thing, it’s that if you keep the school open in the afternoon, until five, it will help families and keep kids off the street.”

In Tor Bella Monaca, politics is often limited to the empty propaganda of election campaigns. The neighbourhood is the target for political and social proselytism that has often undermined the quality and effective meaning of politics and the solutions it could offer. As the neighbourhood remains on the fringes of political concerns, the real potential for transformation of the local environment remains untapped, leaving the security of Tor Bella Monaca in the hands of grassroots initiatives. “Have you seen how many green spaces there are? A lot could be achieved by investing in the environment and the area’s young people,” explains Emiliano.

In much of Europe, enclaves of inequality have become hotbeds of far-right populism. "The municipality is governed by Fratelli d'Italia. When the president was elected, in Via dell'Archeologia they celebrated with the Roman [straight-armed fascist] salute. To think that in the 1980s, this was one of the most communist neighbourhoods in Rome. What happened?" In places like Tor Bella Monaca, where economic deprivation prevails and public services have withered away, political polarisation and social conflict are generated by a neighbourhood life that no longer sees the benefits of politics and the collective social system.

Across the outskirts and neglected geographies of Europe, the same slow ritual of inequality is unfolding, driven by a generational failure of institutions and politics.

The efforts of the Melissa Bassi Institute in Tor Bella Monaca tell the story of the many schools operating on the frontline across Europe, down the vortex of inequalities where the centrifugal force of the educational system fights against the centripetal force of the neighbourhood. It might seem clear that education is central to building a fair society. But the institutions across Europe's rural and urban peripheries require more resources, personnel, and autonomy than others, and these areas are the ones often most overlooked.

Despite limping institutional support, a driven teaching staff guided by a common vision allowed Melissa Bassi to show the potential of educational institutions operating in contexts of deep deprivation. It is not enough, but it is proof that guaranteeing access to quality education and long-term investment in neglected areas should be a priority for all who want to unhinge the spatial disparities afflicting Europe.

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ALTERNATIVES TO NATIONALIST EDUCATION

LESSONS FROM POLAND

AN INTERVIEW WITH
ANNA DZIERZGOWSKA

After almost a decade of national-conservative rule in Poland, the country's school system is increasingly oriented towards preserving an antiquated view of the past rather than empowering students with the tools for critical thinking. Anna Dzierzgowska, a teacher working in both state and non-state schools in Warsaw, explains how the roots of the problem can be traced even further back than the reforms introduced by the Law and Justice Party (PiS) and makes the case for a more inclusive and pluralistic understanding of history.

GREEN EUROPEAN JOURNAL: How would you describe the approach of the PiS government to education and school policy since it came to power in 2015?

ANNA DZIERZGOWSKA: Before I answer this question, I need to clarify the position from which I'm speaking. For most of my professional life, I taught history in the non-state school system; at present I work in both the social and the public education sectors. I also have a family background in teaching as the daughter of one of those responsible for the educational reforms brought in by the centre-right coalition government [now in opposition] from 1997.

Among other changes, these reforms resulted in the creation of gymnasia, a middle tier between primary and post-16 education. Data from studies such as PISA showed that their creation led to improved educational outcomes, while also reducing the gap in the quality of education between cities and the countryside. After initial problems due to the fact that these schools were for pupils at a particularly difficult age, many teachers developed a certain fondness for teaching in them.

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This article is available in Polish on the *Green European Journal* website.

ALTERNATYWY DLA NACJONALISTYCZNEJ EDUKACJI. LEKCJA Z POLSKI

Anna Dzierzgowska opowiada o zmianach w programach nauczania. To, kogo i co znajdziemy w zawartych w nich opowieściach o przeszłości, ma znaczenie dla naszej przyszłości.

I started with this aspect of the Polish education system for a reason. One of the key PiS electoral promises was to abolish gymnasia and return to the old system of eight years of primary school and four of secondary education instead of the "6+3+3" format. Restoring the school system of the past was a way to appeal to the specific conservatism of their voters. I didn't believe they would do it, but they did. Chaos ensued. Secondary schools got more pupils but not more teachers, increasing numbers of whom left teaching for other professions.

PiS made major changes to the curriculum in 2017 to promote a certain understanding of Poland's national story. What were this reform's goals? Who and what is included, and what is obscured from this telling of Polish history?

History is at the vanguard of this conservative counter-revolution, but then it has always been conceived of in a nation-centric manner in Poland. The political role of history always trumped its social or economic aspects. Now this trend has been turbo-charged, to the point that I am thinking of leaving teaching altogether.

The changes introduced by PiS are starting to leave less room for teaching through the lens of freedom or Europe, for example. Instead, the focus has shifted to three pillars: Greek culture, Roman law, and Christianity. What's more, the Christian pillar has become narrower, excluding the Judeo-Christian aspects of its former interpretation. Rather than looking at the past and recognising the complexity of human history and the various areas of struggle and of cultural interchange, we now have a narrow, propaganda-style narrative of a great Poland in a mighty Europe. But this type of history does not help us to understand the roots of the modern world (dis)order, let alone question it.

Similar trends can be observed in other subjects. The course previously known as "Knowledge of Society" has become "History and Today". Despite its name, it offers very limited scope for the discussion of contemporary issues. More time is spent on the obsessions of the current minister of education, Przemysław Czarnek, with his anti-gender, anti-feminist, anti-LGBTQI+ outlook. I am sometimes tempted to start teaching this subject so I can talk about these issues in my own way and, by doing so, undermine what the ministry is trying to achieve.

This shift came about despite the popularity of Knowledge of Society classes among pupils. Discussing contemporary issues is a source of real enthusiasm. For example, during the recent humanitarian crisis on Poland's eastern border – which was more of a massive human rights violation crisis – I talked with my students about the war in Afghanistan and watched documentaries on the recent Taliban takeover with them. The aim was to understand where some of the refugees coming to Poland were

IN POLAND, THE POLITICAL ROLE OF HISTORY ALWAYS TRUMPED ITS SOCIAL OR ECONOMIC ASPECTS

from and why Poland is at least partially responsible for their situation. The contemporary history of western and central Asia is a topic we would be very interested in doing more on. Instead, we are having to endure a subject that treats any new way of thinking, including ecology, as a possible threat to the conservative standpoint, from which teenagers need to be protected.

How does this differ from the curriculum in place previously, and what effects can be observed after five years?

These changes have led to a lack of a wider, more global view of events. This is a programme that closes us off from the world. It also results in a false sense of knowledge. People leave school believing that they know a lot about the world and what constitutes knowledge and history. They may not remember all the facts, but they know that history means politics and not the histories of women or sexual minorities, for example.

This leads us back to the previous question on whose history we're talking about. We are operating within a national perspective that developed in the 19th century alongside Eurocentrism, colonialism, and xenophobia. We learn about Mieszko I as the creator of the modern Polish state, but we omit to mention that this narrative has little or no standing within contemporary historical research.

What is worse, this 10th-century duke is presented as one of the key actors in the contemporary world: a world of climate and refugee crises. We make students memorise Polish rulers from the past, but don't consider it a problem if they don't know what Asia looks like or who lives in western Asia and that some of them are not Muslim – not to mention that Muslim people should not be equated with Islamists.

This already gives you an idea of whose history this is. It is a narrow interpretation of the past in which communities other than states

and nations are sidelined. We learn very little about the history of peasants as a class, the historical position of women, or different forms of societal organisation such as hunter-gatherer societies. When talking about slavery in the United States, there are even some teaching materials that focus more on white abolitionists than the experiences of African Americans.

All of this is happening in the context of an overloaded curriculum with a lack of time for critical analysis and learning about how to interpret and discuss history. As a result, final history exams have nothing to do with assessing whether teenagers have gained the tools they need to understand the world; instead, they test the rote learning of facts of little relevance to today's world and students compete to see who can achieve the best results.

The shade of government pursued by PiS is distinctive for its conservative, family-based welfarist policies, notably a substantial child benefit system. Does this investment in the welfare state extend to education?

I would object to this take on PiS policies. While it is true that some support programmes were introduced, including the famous 500 zlotys per child, this does not translate into creating a modern welfare state. It is also true that schools are now better equipped, and some local authorities are investing more in teacher training, but our earnings are still relatively precarious.

The pandemic laid bare the lack of investment in the system. Online classes were given using teachers' private equipment. Many pupils had serious mental health problems – a topic discussed but not tackled – and some basically disappeared from online lessons for weeks and months at a time.

The situation is even more dire in the other spheres that should form the backbone of a modern welfare state. We have a crisis in the public healthcare system and lack a coherent housing policy. Cultural institutions, instead of being seen as important sites for civic dialogue, are places to be captured for conservative politics. Public transport options, especially beyond the larger cities, are limited.

In 2019, there was a major strike by Polish teachers. Could you explain the dispute and the political relationship between the teaching force and the government today?

The problems I have described led to rising discontent with and anger towards the government. The result was weeks of strikes and the cancellation of lessons. PiS used headteachers to put down the strike, people who often privately supported industrial action but who, because of their role, had to obey orders from above. They were forced to hold

final exams and that eventually caused the strike to fizzle out.

This was a bitter experience. For many weeks the government seemed not to care that children weren't receiving an education. The teachers were not listened to but rather exhausted into compliance. While the strike was officially suspended, it continued in the form of people leaving the teaching profession. More and more of us teach in more than one school, a situation that leads to better incomes for teachers but that is terrible for school communities. We roam from one part of the city to another, lacking the time to bond with pupils and parents.

The way teaching is monitored has also been subject to major changes. Dialogue between school board representatives and teachers, pupils, and parents has been replaced with bureaucratic formalities. All that matters is that the paperwork is properly filed. This has undermined real communication and the proper functioning of schools.

What alternatives are there for parents who wish to avoid an overly nationalistic education for their children? Can turning to non-state education reinforce urban/progressive and rural/conservative divides?

I was a pupil at the first non-state school in Poland, but that doesn't mean I'm a fan of this model. I got quite a lot from the school, and it provided some basic security to teachers and pupils, but the availability of private education can lead to parents with high social capital drifting away from the public school system, which in turn petrifies social divisions. It is yet another example of how a decision that is good and rational on an individual level (i.e. due to the fact that pupils learn in smaller classes) can lead to negative social outcomes.

Some problems are universal. The whole education system is currently designed in a way that hinders cooperation between parents and teachers, leading to difficulties when teachers prioritise teaching the curriculum – because it is beneficial in terms of state exams – over critical thinking. This adds to broader tensions around the question of who should be in the driver's seat: public institutions or parents.

The extended social isolation caused by the pandemic also led to widespread problems. When we see youngsters coming back to school, we notice how difficult it is to teach them basic social skills. This in turn may lead

MY DREAM WOULD BE TO TEACH HISTORY BY TAKING MY STUDENTS TO BERLIN, TO TEHRAN, TO RIO DE JANEIRO

to rising disengagement from the public school system through home-schooling, causing even wider social stratification.

How does your teaching experience in a multicultural school in Warsaw inform your thinking on education and particularly history?

My dream would be to teach history by taking my students to Berlin in September, to Tehran in October, to Rio de Janeiro the next month… While I know this may not be realistic, the idea of not limiting ourselves to the four walls of the school building and learning critical thinking by exploring public spaces surely is.

My "minimum programme" for the education system involves reading at least one true historical book (and not just a textbook) per year, allowing pupils to be confronted with different narratives. In my lessons, we discuss these sources and learn about the development of history as a science. Luckily, we now have more online sources that can be put to good use as well, such as recordings of discussions. I said "more", but it's still not enough, even for topics that should not be a problem, such as the women's suffrage movement. Sometimes these materials – such as documentaries on *ARTE* about colonisation or sexuality and gender – are only online for a limited period of time, which limits their usability.

This kind of source-based education is possible in a non-state school where there are 20 students per class; it is much harder in a state school with 36 pupils in a single room. It's why we need to cut class sizes. Limiting the frequency of formal testing is also important to allow space for discussion and the exchange of ideas. We need fewer tests and more perspectives, including ones from outside Europe.

How can history be used to create shared but non-exclusive identities, build bridges, and expand the imaginary for good?

First of all, in the Polish context, we need to make the system coherent. Teachers often say that when you close the classroom door you are basically free to do whatever you want as long as you jump through all the bureaucratic hoops and your students pass their exams: it's a sort of a guerrilla tactic. But you can't build an education system on such a premise. Universal education should give us all the tools we need to understand the difficult and complicated reality in which we live.

In our class we recently read *In Desert and Wilderness*, a 1911 novel by Polish Nobel laureate Henryk Sienkiewicz; not as a literary work, but as a historical source. It is the story of a Polish boy and an English girl living in Egypt who are kidnapped by Sudanese rebels. They fight for survival and meet stereotypical "natives", including Arabs and Black Africans. Confronting the racism present in this book was a traumatic experience, both for me and for my students. But the book is just a normal part of the curriculum for primary school children and is taught and read without giving the wider context that explains its racist overtones. So a critical approach is essential.

We face an everlasting discussion about a canon, a set of texts with which all members of a certain community are expected to be familiar. I would like to shift this discussion to thinking about ways in which we promote reading in general and present a more diverse set of materials, including contemporary literature, which is largely on the sidelines of the current curriculum in Poland. We should not limit ourselves to a national perspective here. We also need to recognise and strengthen another tool for understanding the world: the arts, giving people the possibility to express themselves and learn to cooperate instead of competing with each other. This could certainly help us to build a better future.

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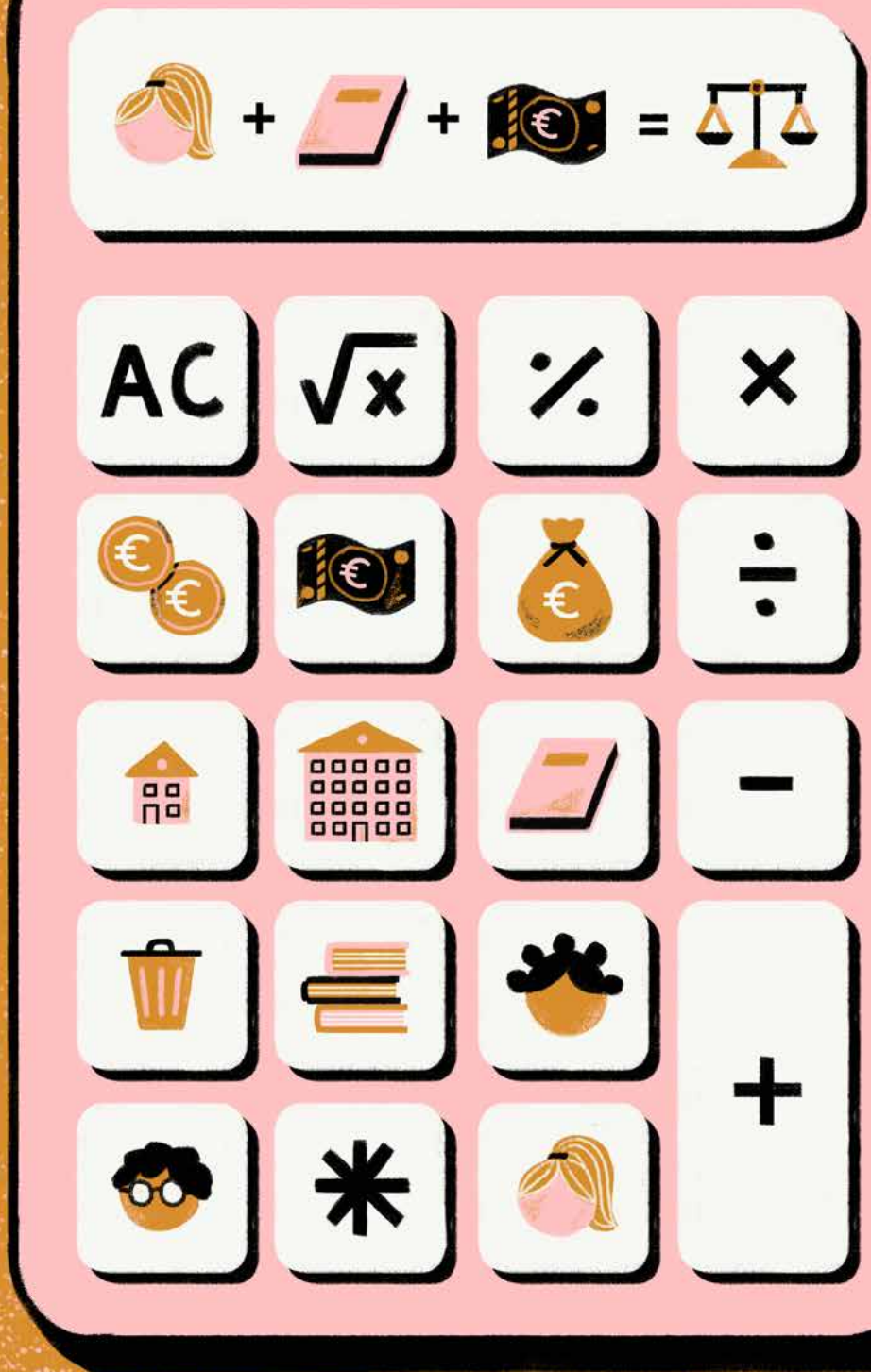
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PEACE BEGINS AT SCHOOL?
EDUCATION IN POST-CONFLICT SOCIETIES

Schools in post-conflict contexts face a unique set of challenges, trying to forge a path forward in societies that often remain deeply divided. In such environments, violence is far from an abstract concept confined to the pages of history. Its legacy is present in multiple ways, whether in governing institutions, public space, or the living memory of families.

As a place where state narratives are conveyed, schools play a pivotal role. But there is a limit to their potential to reshape attitudes built over generations. Political structures and power-sharing arrangements designed to mediate between warring sides often create barriers to real reconciliation. As a result of the failure to find a common story, the past is often put to one side, leading to loud silences that further sharpen different identities, sustaining a climate of tension and mistrust.

Two cases, from opposite ends of the European continent, provide fascinating vantage points from which to look at the role of schools and educators in shaping the mentalities of the next generations of citizens. In both Northern Ireland and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the persistence of sectarian outlooks and a lack of political will to overcome them have hindered progress towards unity. Moving beyond a form of co-existence in which the resurgence of past conflicts remains a permanent risk requires imaginative new approaches, as well as time and determination. Bringing young people together is only half the battle; there is also a need to cultivate certain states of mind and feelings and foster patterns of thinking that reach beyond essentialist binaries. The following interviews with Shelley McKeown Jones and Sabina Čehajić-Clancy explore how the words, stories, and lessons spoken in classrooms every day can make a real difference.

NORTHERN IRELAND
The Tight Gag of Place

GREEN EUROPEAN JOURNAL: Over 20 years after the Good Friday Agreement, tensions between the two main communities in Northern Ireland continue to flare up in sporadic outbreaks of violence. These often involve people too young to have any real memory of the conflict. What explains these enduring divisions?

SHELLEY McKEOWN JONES: Put simply, the divisions in Northern Ireland stem from a historical conflict between two groups in society surrounding the constitutional state of the island of Ireland: the Catholic/Irish/Nationalist community and the Protestant/British/Unionist community. Despite being over 20 years since the signing of the peace agreement and relations significantly improving, unfortunately Northern Ireland remains a divided society – evident through segregated neighbourhoods, separate school systems, and a fractured political system.

Even though we aren't seeing the same levels of violence now as in the 1960s and 1970s, the legacy of the conflict and associated identity markers distinguishing "us" and "them" remain very visible in today's Northern Ireland: in murals, flags, and painted kerbstones, as well as "peace walls" separating communities. What this mean is that young people growing up in Northern Ireland are experiencing a fragile peace. Relations are better than at the height of the conflict but, at the same time, youth continue to be exposed to intergenerational narratives about the history of the conflict that can sometimes reinforce traditional divisions.

SHELLEY McKEOWN JONES is an associate professor of social psychology at the University of Bristol's School of Education. From Northern Ireland, her research focuses on understanding and improving intergroup relations for youth in conflict and diverse settings.

How is the Northern Irish educational system affected by the persistent spatial and institutional segregation? Have there been attempts to bridge the divides between communities?

In Northern Ireland, there is a complicated and almost parallel, separate schooling system running, with most

young people attending either a Catholic or a Protestant school. There are five school management types: primarily Protestant-background schools (called controlled schools), primarily Catholic-background schools (called maintained schools), voluntary grammar schools, planned integrated schools, and other maintained schools. People usually send their children to schools that are aligned with their own community – out of habit or tradition. Historically, there's been a narrative that if you're of a particular ethno-religious affiliation then you need to learn about what that means. And so the segregation continues over the generations.

More and more people, however, are interested in sending their children to integrated schools. Integrated education came about in Northern Ireland in the 1970s. There was a bottom-up group called All Children Together that campaigned to educate young people from Catholic and Protestant backgrounds together. The very first integrated secondary school was Lagan College, founded in 1981. The aspiration at the time was that this should be the future of our education system. Fast-forwarding to today, however, only around 5-7 per cent of young people attend integrated schools; the majority still attend religiously separate schools. Despite its potential to make a difference, integrated education has been held back by a lack of funding support. It has encountered opposition, often because people are worried about funding being taken away from the controlled and maintained schools. Things, however, are about to change thanks to the 2022 Integrated Education Act (Northern Ireland), which commits additional funding for integrated education.

With the aspiration for everyone to be educated together still unrealised, what are the alternatives?

This is where it's useful to look at what happens in cross-community, non-formal educational programmes and to think about how children attending separate schools can be brought together. In the past, sports programmes and other activities brought young Catholic and Protestant people together. More recently, a lot of money has been put into shared education, which tries to find ways of bringing Catholic and Protestant schools together so that young people can interact and learn together without the institutions being formally integrated.

There is a broader question here about the role of education in promoting peace. For some people, education is a place where you take your academic subjects – English, maths, science – so you can go out into the world and get a job. For others, education is more than that. It's where you prepare yourself for the world, as a member of society and not just as an individual. The question is to what extent schools can and should do this, and how.

Some people believe education can fix everything. But the reality is that at the end of the school day, young people go home to often segregated communities. To have a real effect on society, the things they learn about need to ripple out beyond the school gates. So the question for me is: how do we transform society through peace education?

Should a greater focus be placed on peace education in school curricula rather than on attempts to bring together young people from the different communities?

I think you need both. My view is that contact is key because once you get people in a room together, they can start to learn about each other and challenge stereotypes. The problem is that even when you've got people together, they don't necessarily interact in a meaningful way, or it might even be negative. So you need to go beyond the simple act of bringing people together – whether that's in an integrated school, Shared Education, or other non-formal education programmes – and let them get to know each other first. Once they get to know each other on a personal level, over a period of time, those difficult issues around group identities and difference can start to be addressed. Until that happens, they're never going to really understand each other's perspective because they won't have that depth of knowledge about the other person or the other "side".

But it's complicated – facilitating meaningful interactions in conflict or post-conflict settings requires a number of things. One challenge is finding space for this in the curriculum when schools are already highly pressured in terms of grades and outcomes. Where does peace or the integrated relations agenda fit in alongside the more "academic" subjects? For me, peace education needs to be part of the ethos of the school and embedded in what the teachers are modelling across all subjects. There are ways to do that, for instance, by using examples in maths, English, or science classes that feature intergroup relations or get people thinking about difference in some way. I strongly believe that young people need to be prepared to cope with diversity when they go out into society, and while that isn't easy to do in monocultural environments where there is potentially no contact, it is possible through the school curriculum and I think it is our duty to ensure this happens. So, these two aspects need to go hand in hand: contact and thinking about it from a whole-school ethos perspective.

What structural changes are needed for this type of education to foster less essentialist ways of thinking?

One of the most crucial aspects in my view is supporting teachers. Many might not be prepared for difficult conversations about community relations and violence in their classes. Conflict resolution and peace education

should be a compulsory part of their training: how to build supportive environments in schools in relation to religious and ethnic difference. They need to be comfortable with this side of teaching, otherwise they might be reluctant to approach these conversations.

The second aspect to consider is how we implement peace education in schools. My view is that peace education, or some kind of community relations focus, should be embedded across the curriculum rather than being a separate subject of study. It ought to be an orientation or ethos for the school as a whole, something that is present within every aspect of its work: the school's mission, the teachers it recruits, the activities and trips it offers, the material teachers use and the stories they tell. Where do the children go, what are they exposed to, and what are they encouraged to think about? Such an approach requires investment on multiple levels: investment in a system of education where not only students but also teachers are supported in engaging in this process.

Should history be taught differently to give young people alternative narratives about Northern Ireland's recent history?

The question here is, whose history are we telling? How can we tell a common story when there are multiple, often opposing, communities? It's difficult when there is no objective history; you risk a watered-down version to avoid disagreements. This is often the reason for avoiding talking about these historical conflicts entirely. I didn't learn about any of Northern Ireland's history when I was at school. There is a Seamus Heaney quote that epitomises Northern Ireland: "Whatever you say, say nothing." Whatever do you, do not talk about the conflict, because that would be uncomfortable.

For real peace education, you need to talk about the conflict, otherwise you'll never address the issues behind it. Why did it happen, and what does it mean? But we also need to think about the best way into those discussions. It takes time. One way might be, for example, teaching about another, similar context elsewhere and then drawing parallels closer to home.

Identity, particularly among young people, can often be social and dynamic. Is this the case in Northern Ireland, and if so how can it help inform the way that educational spaces attempt to overcome divisions?

Identity is very much context dependent for everyone, including young people. We all emphasise certain parts of our identity depending on the situation we're in. Religion might not be salient at school but very important at home or in the community, for example. For young people in Northern Ireland, the reality is that they're growing up in a place where there is

a legacy of conflict, where competing identities are everywhere around them.

My experience is that many people in Northern Ireland either self-categorise or are categorised along traditional lines. Of course, this can be important to monitor, for equal opportunities for jobs, for example, but it makes it almost inescapable, and at times it can feel like everything is divided, politically and geographically. Speaking to young people in classrooms, the traditional Catholic-Protestant divide seems less salient. What is interesting is that there are more and more young people – at least, the ones I speak to when I go into classrooms – who are saying "other" or "neither" when you ask them about their identity. Historically, people would typically say they're Catholic or Protestant, even if they're not religious, because they've been brought up in a certain ethno-religious background. Research often ignores those who don't identify with either community, but we need to understand why the traditional identities no longer seem relevant, and whether they have given way to new identities.

Often young people are seen as victims or troublemakers rather than peacemakers, but, in my experience, they are very thoughtful and articulate. In my research, I've seen that they are often more open and keener to talk about community relations than older people. When I ask them if they interact with people across different groups, they say that they don't know who's Catholic or Protestant and that their friends are just their friends. Maybe that's what happens when people are a bit younger. As you get older, you become more aware of who is part of which group, who belongs in which space, and what those differences are. Sometimes the barriers lie with the older generations.

Are there initiatives from other divided societies that could be trialled in Northern Ireland?

There are great things going on in other places that are, in some ways, quite similar to Shared Education in Northern Ireland. Examples include bilingual schools in Israel and Palestine and bicommunal programmes in Cyprus. They often work according to the principle that promoting better contact between groups in conflict will help improve things in society. But each society needs to find its own way, taking into consideration the context, the culture, and the nature of the conflict.

For me, some form of contact is the key principle, be that through direct meetings between individuals or groups or indirect contact through learning about other communities in schools. The ideal would be direct contact: educating people together, in whatever way possible. Contact is crucial, and education is just one place to do that, albeit one with a captive audience. ■

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

The Power of Discovering Our Shared Humanity

GREEN EUROPEAN JOURNAL: The 1995 Dayton Peace Accords were designed to put an end to the violent conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina. But has another consequence been to cement certain divisions? If so, how are these manifested in the education system?

SABINA ČEHAJIĆ-CLANCY: As well as being a peace agreement, this accord is our constitution: it sets up and structures our country and society, including education. That framework, which was simply handed to us, is by nature segregated. The system itself and the structures in place entrench and sometimes deepen the issues that arose through the conflict.

So our hands are tied to begin with, and it becomes difficult to even imagine, let alone implement measures to overcome segregation and promote inclusive education. As a result, peacebuilding in education has been completely taken over by the non-formal sector: NGOs, foundations, civil society organisations, and international organisations such as UN agencies. The formal educational system leaves little room for manoeuvre. If anything, these education structures are creating further divisions. We have 14 ministries that are in some way responsible for education. Fourteen, for a country of not even 3 million people!

SABINA ČEHAJIĆ-CLANCY is an associate professor of social psychology at Stockholm University. Her work examines psychological processes of intergroup behaviour in complex social situations such as conflict.

In Bosnia, the political elite in power has barely changed since Dayton. Their goal is not sustainable peace, integration, or inclusivity. Rather it is to maintain division, because this allows them to retain power. While there is no lack of good practices being implemented by the non-formal education sector, without addressing these questions at a formal structural level, it's hard to foresee a sustainable solution.

What are the biggest challenges in education in Bosnia-Herzegovina?

One of the main issues is that the country has become very homogenised, both in terms of the country as a whole, and in the cities, cantons, and villages. There are a few exceptions – communities where people from different ethnic national groups live together on relatively good terms – but, generally speaking, the country is physically segregated.

This homogenisation has been one of the most important consequences of the war. When you look at ethnic distribution before the war, it was generally a very blurred and mixed picture. But now the lines have been clearly drawn. This prevents any meaningful sustained contact with others. It is not that people never encounter those from other groups; they do, but it is a superficial form of contact. To create deeper bonds we need to live next to each other, and with each other; to share our daily lives.

The second problem is the way we talk or don't talk about the past and the conflict. What happened during the war is simply not addressed in formal education. It is as if history stopped in the early 1990s. Children and young people learn about it from other sources: from parents, the media, their peers, social media. These information sources are more biased than formal education, at least in theory.

Do competing historical narratives make it difficult to devise a single curriculum for all communities?

Competing narratives definitely exist and introducing them in formal education could just add more fuel to the fire. It all depends on the decision-makers. It is those who are in power and who make decisions on education who determine the process and its broader goal. Today their goal is not to create a peaceful and integrated society. As such, the better solution may be to avoid bringing these issues to the table at all in a formal sense while they are in power.

Learning about the conflict and its history is a very demanding task, psychologically speaking. It's not an easy process to engage and come to terms with the past when it relates directly to us. If someone learns about atrocities committed by a group they love and with which they identify, this can put them in a very heightened emotional state and generate a lot of discomfort. Doing this in the wrong way can make the situation much worse. This is why some argue it's better not to talk about it at all; to brush it under the carpet rather than risk opening Pandora's box.

That doesn't mean it's impossible. As painful as it is to unpack different narratives and a difficult past, we have to do it. I believe there is a way to talk about the past, including conflict, without adding to divisions. But this requires a

high degree of involvement and control from all stakeholders. It's not enough to just get young people from different groups around the table and hope for a positive outcome.

Your work focuses on the psychological dimensions of conflict resolution. How does this inform the approaches you advocate for children and young people?

It starts with the premise that moral judgments are among the key drivers of how we behave towards others. If "we" perceive and judge "them" as being not only all the same, but also as being immoral – as being a homogenous, immoral social group, the "bad guys" – that's where the problem starts. In post-conflict societies, these perceptions are accentuated because atrocities were committed. And they don't come out of nowhere; they are maintained and fuelled by truths and facts on all sides. There is no side that hasn't done anything wrong. People just pick and choose which wrongs to focus on.

The goal is not to revise history or minimise immorality, but to stretch our understanding and perspective of who "they" are and what "they" have done, to understand "their" role in our shared history. We do this by focusing on and documenting the stories of what we call "moral exemplars". These are individuals who, during the war, put themselves at risk in some way to protect or save the life of a member of a different social group; an "out-group" member. For example, the story of a Bosnian Serb who saved his Muslim neighbours and was killed by his own people as a result. These were gestures that went beyond just helping others, associated as they were with important risks.

We documented these moral exemplar stories, which are part of history, part of the truth. Yet they are not the stories that are taught, shared, or reported on. This allows for an expansion of what we know and how we think about history, particularly the history of the conflict. We then presented them to our participants and tested for any shifts in their thinking and feeling about and behaviour towards social out-groups. We observed strong effects across a range of variables. Crucially, we observed positive changes in inter-group trust, greater levels of forgiveness, increased hope for reconciled and better futures in our societies, and a stronger intention to engage with out-group members.

Most importantly, we have been able to replicate the success of this intervention across different contexts and cultures, including Armenian-Turkish relations, Polish-German relations, and most recently Serbian and Albanian relations. We also have data from Sweden, not a post-conflict country but one that is complex and culturally more heterogeneous now than ever before. We are also working on relations between Shia and

Sunni Muslims in Pakistan. The fact that this approach works every time tells us that there is something very powerful behind it. This can and should be used in teaching about history and conflict in order to bring about sustained peace and better relations.

Controlling the content of the discussions that happen during contact between people from different groups has been shown to work. This demonstrates that there is a way to bring kids together, to bring the past to the discussion table, and to make it work. Instead of experiencing greater levels of animosity and prejudice and less tolerance, they walk out of these interventions feeling more hopeful, more trusting, and more forgiving towards the other.

You stress the importance of emotions for cultivating forgiveness and trust in post-conflict societies, even among younger generations who do not have living memory of the conflict.

When I began working on post-conflict societies, I took a very cognitive and rational approach to understanding reconciliation (speaking from a psychological perspective here, not legal, political, or historical). I started from the assumption that we need to change how we think about each other, the war, and the conflict, to change narratives or agree on a common narrative. I thought, "If only we tell people what happened and if only they accept it, we will be fine."

Then, when I started actually conducting research with people, I realised how strong and prominent emotions are, and the extent to which they determine how people in these divided communities behave and think. I realised that emotions are a problem. In this case we are talking about negative emotions: fear, hatred, guilt, anger. They take over everything we attempt to do, and they colour our behaviours, but they're also the solution. It's not a cognitive, rational process; it's very much an emotional process. What we need to do is find ways to transform these negative emotions and generate more positive feelings: about the self, about the home group, about the other group, about the past, and about the future.

It's not just that "we need to love each other" and then the story ends. We need to come to terms with the past, and the wrongs done by our own group. I cannot be angry every time you bring up an atrocity committed by my group. Because if I'm angry, I'll be defensive, and this creates further conflict. So the creation of positive emotional responses towards a whole range of issues must be embedded in the reconciliation process.

To introduce new information, to have a discussion in which we can agree to disagree: even to get to that point requires some degree of openness and trust. They cannot be afraid of me, or the other. Because if people are closed off, we can't reach out to them to intervene.

The question then becomes: how can we design forms of contact that will actually either transform and regulate negative emotions or create positive emotions? The moral exemplar intervention has proven effective in a range of different contexts. So the question is not whether it works, but why it works. The answer appears to be emotional: the stories that they hear induce a sense of moral awe, of inspiration, and of admiration. Kids are just blown away by these stories, and they create this positive, calming emotional backdrop that then opens up a psychological space for everything else to start to evolve.

What is the role of non-formal education in contrast to more formal education?

In general, non-formal education in relation to peacebuilding and repairing relations plays an important role in Bosnia-Herzegovina, particularly because formal education is doing so little, or sometimes even making the situation worse. These initiatives should continue and must be supported and funded. Having said that, not all of the initiatives being implemented and funded are bringing about change on the ground. There are limitations to how much they can do. The question of how to build a peaceful society together cannot be left in the hands of a few motivated individuals or a few great organisations. This must be the responsibility of our institutions, which have greater permanence and durability and should be independent of individual conflicts and schemes. That goes not just for Bosnia, but for all post-conflict societies.

Although political change seems unlikely in the short term, do you see any evidence of a shift in the identities of children and young people as a result of greater contact with others, maybe through social media or travel?

Honestly, I don't know. Part of the new generation is open-minded, inclusive, and progressive in so many ways. At the same time, another part is more prejudiced and intolerant than their parents' generation. It's not an either/or situation.

The problem is that it seems to be precisely those who are more open-minded and progressive, and often more educated, who are choosing to leave the country. We are witnessing a flux of people leaving, a huge brain drain. I fear that this could have a real impact on society over the next decade. If you ask me about the future, I feel it could go in any direction.


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RUSSIA AND UKRAINE'S TUG OF WAR OVER MEMORY

ARTICLE BY
RALUCA BESLIU

After the fall of communism, the countries of the former Soviet Union started the process of reshaping their national identities in order to build their futures. Revising state-controlled history textbooks was one of the most important steps. Teaching a shared past plays a key role in constructing collective identities, but such narratives can also plant the seeds of conflict and division.

For many new post-Soviet states, the fall of the Soviet Union was a victory for self-determination and freedom. It was widely accompanied by a sense of patriotism and solidarity, then reflected in how these young states set about (re)writing their histories. In contrast, in Russia, the transition from communism to democracy was painful and disruptive, bringing not only economic chaos and poverty but also a loss of status after decades of global power.

In both Ukraine and Russia, the process of revisiting Soviet history textbooks became highly politicised. Political actors understood that the way in which historical events are remembered is key to the battle over national identity. Those who control the narrative are able to determine how younger generations relate to their history and conceive their future.

World War II was the largest military conflict in human history and left its mark on many nations. As such, memories of the war have always been political. Many eastern European countries saw their borders redrawn and their political regimes communised. In Ukraine and Russia, the memory of World War II remains crucial to the political struggles of today and helped feed the increasing polarisation that led to the February 2022 invasion: on the one hand, Russia as an aggressive enemy oppressing Ukraine; on the other, Russia as the benevolent saviour of Ukraine and Europe as a whole.

HISTORY AS A BATTLEFIELD

In Ukraine, the de-Sovietisation of history began shortly after the collapse of the USSR in 1991. However, the process of intensive historical revision only began under Viktor Yushchenko's pro-Western presidency between 2005 and 2010. Yushchenko came to power with the ambition of consolidating a new Ukraine, entering office after surviving an assassination attempt during the election campaign he fought against pro-Moscow candidate Viktor Yanukovych.

Re-evaluating World War II was a key aspect of creating an anti-Soviet Ukrainian national history and bringing Ukraine closer to the EU. Debunking the Soviet myth of the war would help decolonise Ukrainian history. In 2006, Ukraine established the Institute of National Memory, which aimed to restore and preserve the national memory of the Ukrainian people, combatting historical myths and presenting its struggle for statehood during the 20th century. The institute encourages the "development of youth, patriotic, historic, and legal organisations in Ukraine that will promote patriotism among Ukrainian population".[1]

Over time, the institute proved to be relatively controversial. In 2015 it was involved in drafting the decommunisation laws that paved the way for the rehabilitation of ultra-nationalist leaders such as Stepan Bandera, who collaborated with the Nazis and contributed to the deaths of thousands of Jewish and Polish people.

Around the same time, Russia was also moving to revise its history by revitalising its Soviet past. In 2005, during his annual address, Russian President Vladimir Putin called the collapse of the Soviet Union "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century". This address came one month before a celebration to mark 60 years since the end of World War II.

By 2009, the representation of the Second World War in official statements and the mass media had become a battlefield between Russia and Ukraine. Partly in response to the presentation of Russia as an aggressor in the Ukrainian media, then-Russian president Dmitry Medvedev launched the Presidential Commission of the Russian Federation to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests.

With a three-year mandate to "defend Russia against falsifiers of history and those who would deny the Soviet contribution to the victory in World War II" and reporting directly to the president, the commission was charged with collecting evidence on the falsification of historical facts and advising on how to

1 Karina Korostelina (2010). "War of textbooks: History education in Russian and Ukraine". *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 43(2), pp. 129-137.

deal with this. Medvedev justified its creation to counter supposedly "more hostile, more evil, and more aggressive" attempts to rewrite history to Russia's disadvantage.

Since 2006, Ukraine has classified the Stalin-era famine, the Holodomor, as targeted genocide against Ukrainians. Russia's response is that ethnic Russians also died of hunger during the same period in other parts of the USSR. At around the same time, Poland started investigating the massacre of thousands of Polish army officers by the Soviet secret police at Katyn during World War II. The Russian authorities refused to release information about this atrocity from their archives or to launch a new investigation. Medvedev's Russia perceived these countries' attempts to delve into key aspects of Ukrainian and Polish history as threats to Russia's version of history and vision of the past.

The creation of the presidential commission was met with criticism by both the Russian opposition and former Soviet countries, including Ukraine. The former accused it of working to develop a state ideology, which was constitutionally banned at the time, and of rehabilitating Stalin and his policies. Some Ukrainian academics saw the commission as an attempt by Russia to whitewash Soviet history and justify its ongoing denial of human rights.

EVER MORE DISTANT MEMORIES

Following his return to the presidency in 2012, Putin fast-tracked the imposition of a "new Russian history" curated to the political advantage of the regime.[2] For Putin, shaping the historical narrative is a means to justify current actions through past events. The most flagrant example is Putin's 2021 essay "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians", in which he argues that the two countries, along with Belarus, are one people. It was a clear marker on the road to the invasion in 2022, and one that was built on a long-standing process of rationalisation.

In 2014, Putin signed a law criminalising the denial of Nazi crimes and the distortion of the Soviet Union's role in World War II. Infringements are punishable by five years' imprisonment. The law was seen as a way to enable the creation of a monolithic, triumphalist narrative of history for the authoritarian state that Russia was becoming, curtailing freedom of speech and suppressing any voice that might express a more critical outlook.

By 2015, Putin had created a consistent line on the history of World War II as part of a positive narrative for contemporary Russia: the war was an achievement of which the country could be proud, and the

2 Mark Galeotti (2016). "Education in Putin's Russia isn't about history, but scripture". *openDemocracy*. 1 September 2016.

THE EU ALSO SUBSCRIBES TO THE VISION PUT FORTH BY FORMER MEMBERS OF THE SOVIET UNION

Soviet Union had played a central role in the defeat of Nazism. Unpleasant events had been historically necessary and were of little significance relative to other atrocities. In response, in 2015 Ukraine officially switched the day on which it marks the anniversary of the end of the Second World War from 9 May – as celebrated in Russia – to 8 May in line with other European countries. Instead of Victory Day, it is now known in Ukraine as the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation.

Through the decommunisation laws adopted in 2015, Ukraine replaced the Soviet term the "Great Patriotic War" with the term used in Europe, the Second World War. It also prohibited the "propaganda of totalitarian regimes", including by the "public denial of the criminal nature of the Communist totalitarian regime 1917-1991 in Ukraine and of the Nazi totalitarian regime, as well as the dissemination of information aimed to excuse the criminal nature of these regimes".[3] The law has been criticised for its broadness and vagueness, which leaves its application almost completely at the discretion of the authorities and makes it "nearly impossible for individuals to properly anticipate lawful or unlawful behaviour".

Ukraine has not been the only actor to counter Russia's historical narrative of World War II. The European Union also subscribes to the vision put forth by many former members of the Soviet Union. In 2019, a European Parliament resolution expressed concern over the Russian leadership's efforts to "distort historical facts and whitewash crimes committed by the Soviet totalitarian regime", regarding this as "a dangerous component of the information war waged against democratic Europe".[4] It called on the European Commission to decisively counteract these efforts. The resolution further stated that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, a non-aggression agreement signed between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, "paved the way for the outbreak of the Second World War". It compared the Soviet Union's actions to those of Nazi Germany, affirming that the two countries cooperated politically, economically, and militarily, with the common goal of conquering Europe.

Instead of building bridges or opening up dialogue on different historical interpretations that could lead to a more complex, multifaceted version of events, the European institutions also engaged in the politics of memory, targeting the official Russian version of World War II specifically. One of Putin's responses to

3 European Commission for Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission) (2015). *Joint Interim Opinion on the Law of Ukraine on the Condemnation of the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Regimes and Prohibition of Propaganda of their Symbols*. Opinion no. 823/2015.

4 European Parliament (2019). *Motion for a Resolution to wind up the debate on the statements by the Council and the Commission pursuant to Rule 132(2) of the Rules of Procedure on the 80th anniversary of the start of the Second World War and the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe*. Text tabled: B9-0098/2019. 17 September 2019.

these efforts was to launch a new Commission on Historical Education in 2021. Consisting of various state bodies including the secret services, its remit is to ensure "an aggressive approach to upholding the Russian Federation's national interests linked with preserving historical memory and the development of educational activities in the area of history". The creation of the commission coincided with the Russian Ministry of Education's approval of school history textbooks presenting Russia's invasion and annexation of Crimea as a "peaceful process" that involved no Russian soldiers.

DIFFERENT TEXTBOOKS, DIFFERENT STORIES

The historico-political dichotomy that has developed between Russia and Ukraine has been translated into their respective history curricula. Ukraine has gradually portrayed Russia as an oppressive and aggressive enemy, while Russia presents itself as the liberator of Europe, sacrificing its troops for the greater good of the continent.

In Russia, the approval of history textbooks has become heavily centralised. In the past, teachers could choose from a wider range of history textbooks, but during a teachers' conference at the Kremlin in 2007, Putin claimed that "many textbooks are written by people who work to get foreign grants." He accused their writers of dancing "to the polka that others have paid for" and vouched to only approve textbooks with "a more openly nationalistic view of the past".[5] He subsequently began to hand out grants to approved authors, and the government granted itself the power to decide which textbooks could be used. In 2013, Putin endorsed the creation of a standardised textbook presenting a singular version of Russian history, developed with the aim of promoting patriotism and a sense of civic responsibility.

In Ukraine, while there is greater textbook diversity, there is also substantial control over content. The Institute of History is tasked with examining textbooks and assessing their content "based on compliance with the task of the formation of national patriotism". This ultimately also creates a singular vision of history to be presented in schools.

The following example provides a striking illustration of the disparity between the two countries' history textbooks. At the end of 1942, groups of Ukrainian partisans united to form the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). When the Nazis were forced out of Ukraine in 1943, the Soviets turned their attention to the UPA to prevent the development of

5 Andreas D. Boldt (2017). *Historical Mechanisms: An Experimental Approach to Applying Scientific Theories to the Study of History*. New York: Routledge.

an independent Ukrainian army. Fighting between the two forces continued until the UPA's elimination in 1953. In Ukrainian textbooks, UPA fighters are presented as both "heroic and tragic figures", liberating Ukrainian towns and villages while defending civilians and constituting "the avant-garde of the Ukrainian nation of victims".[6] In this way, the Soviet Union is portrayed as an enemy of Ukraine even after the end of World War II, bringing devastation and terror to the country. In Russian history books, in contrast, the UPA is described as a band of traitors who served Nazi Germany and supported the SS, aiming to destroy Soviet power with support from the West. Russian textbooks emphasise that, between 1944 and 1954, the UPA killed tens of thousands of innocent civilians.

A further example of the stark divergence between the Russian and Ukrainian textbook narratives is their portrayal of the beginning of World War II. According to the Russian narrative, the war started in 1941 as the Great Patriotic War to liberate parts of the Motherland after Russia was directly attacked by the Nazis. The war is portrayed as one of the most patriotic moments for the country: a fight for freedom and independence. With regard to the eve of the war, Russian textbooks only give a general overview. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which contained a secret protocol dividing eastern Europe into Nazi and Soviet spheres of influence, is presented as a necessary measure, justified by circumstances. There is no commentary on or consideration of the legal and moral considerations of the secret protocol. The fact that the countries mentioned therein quickly joined the Soviet Union is presented as a democratic choice rather than an imposition.

If Russian history textbooks gloss over the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, their Ukrainian counterparts give it a central role marking the beginning of World War II. The pact is portrayed as an indication of the "imperial nature" of both countries. When it comes to the overall presentation of the war in Ukrainian textbooks for students of all ages, both the Soviet Union and Germany are portrayed as enemies. In a fifth-year textbook, it is stated that neither Nazi Germany nor the Soviet Union were "concerned about the liberation of Ukraine and the establishment of an independent state".

SHAPING THE NEXT GENERATION

Through the politicisation of history textbooks, the leaderships of both Russia and Ukraine are constructing and promoting specific perceptions of both their own nations and their neighbours. These textbooks work

6 Eleonora Narvselius (2015). "The 'Bandera Debate': The Contentious Legacy of World War II and Liberalization of Collective Memory in Western Ukraine". *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, Vol. 54(3-4), pp. 469-490.

towards creating nationalistic populations, entrenched in their own collective identities. This presentation of history provides the basis for the political views and identities of today's students and creates fertile ground for justifying hostile actions against other groups. The effects of the politicisation of historical memory can be observed in the considerable support among the Russian population for both the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Similarly, Ukrainian textbooks provide a longer historical narrative in which the Ukrainian people's resistance to foreign domination can be situated.

The current conflict will likely only intensify the politicisation of history in the two countries. This process has already started. In Russia, textbooks for special lectures in 2022 will indicate that Russia did not invade Ukraine this year, but rather engaged in self-defence against external threats. During the current invasion, the Russian military has been accused of confiscating and destroying Ukrainian history textbooks, considered by the Kremlin as "extremist literature".

The end of the conflict, whatever its outcome, is likely to result in a more entrenched and dichotomous vision of Russia and Ukraine's past, paving the way for an even more bitter and disjointed future. However, we can also envisage non-divisive ways forward for countries with antagonistic versions of history such as Russia and Ukraine. These would be built around an understanding of history that goes beyond the logic of national stories defined against enemies and rival state projects.

Curricula and historical memory initiatives for all ages could be opened up to include alternative perspectives, common European readings, and the voices of groups that would otherwise be overlooked. The result of this would not be a unified national story but rather a more multifaceted and complex perspective on the past and its legacy. Cross-border exchange and discussion programmes could be imagined to help students view historical events through lenses different to their own. While the possibility of such initiatives seems distant for now, developing ways to understand the role of the past in shaping the present are key to a more peaceful future.

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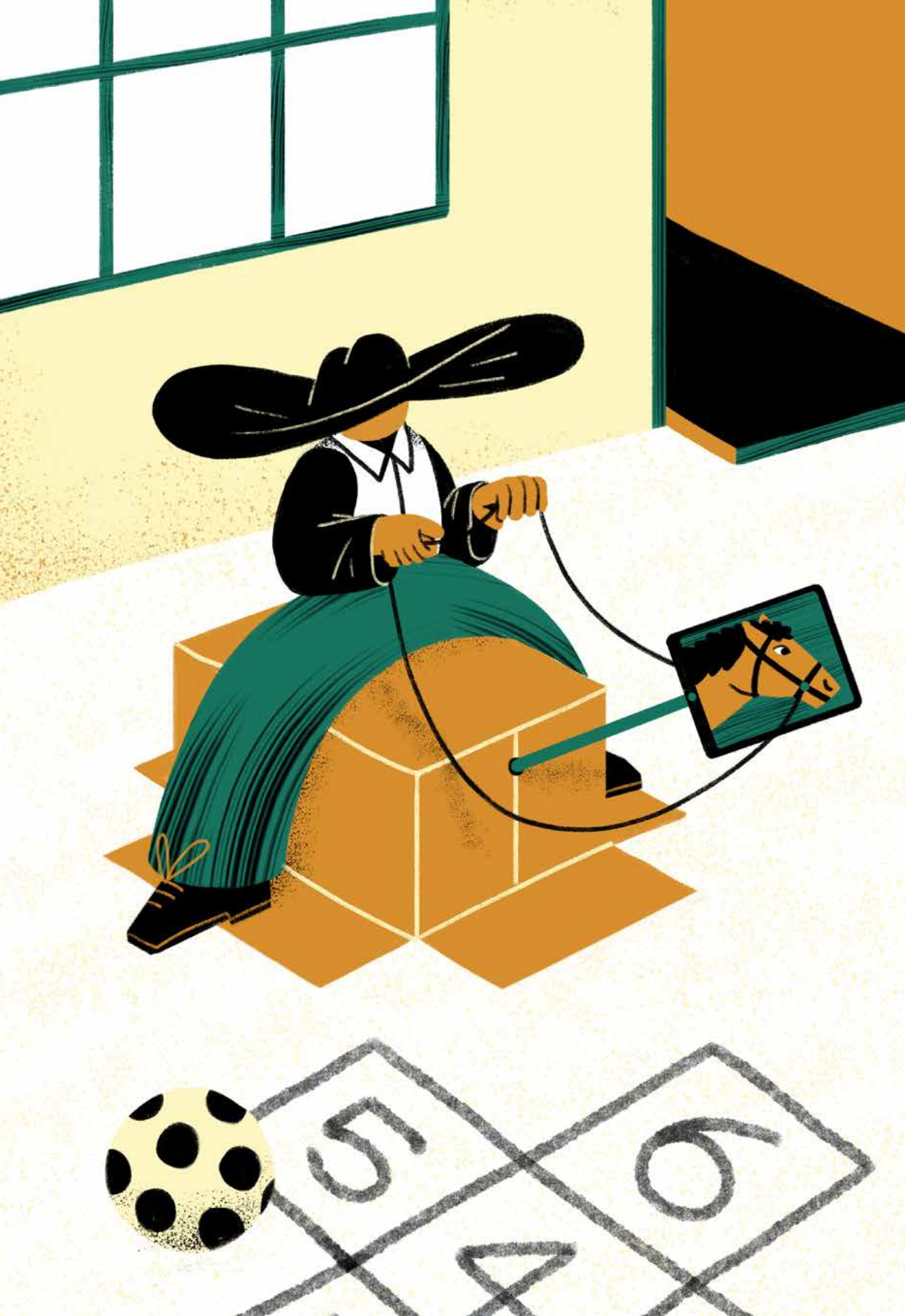

INSIGHTS FROM THE EDUCATION NATION

THE CASE OF ESTONIA

ARTICLE BY
MARIA JÜRIMÄE

In recent years, Estonia has emerged as an educational powerhouse. With an approach to education that combines play and child-centred learning with new technologies, the success draws on lessons from elsewhere but also a long heritage of Estonian pedagogy. Maria Jürimäe traces the history of public education in Estonia to explain the link between education, democracy, and equity in one of Europe's smallest countries.

Estonia is a small country, but its education system is increasingly recognised as one of the most successful in the world in international rankings such as PISA. Estonia is also known as a "digital society" – e-Estonia. Everything from voting to creating a small business can be done with just a few mouse clicks. It also has a reputation as a country of song, which holds massive song festivals and whose Singing Revolution paved the way to independence from the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. But how are these qualities connected?

For Estonia, education is about more than knowledge and skills: it is key to the country's identity and culture. This importance is encapsulated in the slogan "Education Nation". The Estonian educational system has deep roots and the core of its educational thought remained strong throughout the Soviet occupation. Over the past 30 years, education has proven a key means for Estonia to build its independence and develop as a prosperous and resilient society.

THE ROOTS OF ESTONIAN EDUCATION

The roots of public education in the Estonian language can be traced back to the Lutheran Reformation in the 16th century. It is a tenet of

Lutheranism that every Christian should be literate, to be able to read the Bible. Under Swedish rule from the 16th to the 18th century, this idea spread and the level of literacy in Estonia increased. By the time Russian Tsar Peter I conquered Estonia in 1710, the first Estonian-language books had already been published and a system of elementary education was in place. At the beginning of the Tsarist empire, Russia allowed the Baltic states relative autonomy under a doctrine known as the "Baltic Special Order". Estonia's education system was thus able to operate without interference in the 18th century.

From the middle of the 19th century on, Estonia underwent a national awakening. Its network of public schools grew, the first newspapers were founded, and song festivals and associations of peasants, Christian groups, and literary circles emerged. The period of Russification, whereby the Russian Empire sought to impose Russian culture and language across its dominions from the mid-19th century on, took years to reach border areas such as Estonia.

Yet from 1885, Estonian primary schools were forced to teach in Russian and most teachers were replaced. This period lasted until the first Russian Revolution in 1905. Up until the 1917 Revolution, most schools still had to teach in Russian. The result was a decline in the quality of education, as children were forced to learn by memory rather than developing real understanding. But it was through this experience that the foundations of the modern education system began to be laid.

To resist the pressures of Russification, the Estonian national movement developed the concept of national kindergarten. The idea was to guarantee that children's early education would still be in Estonian. The first Estonian-language kindergarten was opened in Tartu in 1905.

Other predominantly Lutheran countries, such as Finland and Sweden, also have a long tradition of public education. However, Estonia's experience of colonisation and forced language change left an indelible mark on its collective memory and built an understanding of the strong link between public education, culture, and identity.

Estonia gained its freedom from Russia in 1918 after winning a war of independence in the aftermath of the First World War. Many former schoolteachers were still around to once again teach in Estonian, and many younger teachers joined their ranks too. An Estonian curriculum, cutting edge for the period, was quickly developed.

Johannes Käis, a leading figure in the restoration of Estonian education, was key to this development. A man ahead of his time,

he was active in teacher training, curriculum development, and textbook writing. His ideas emphasised integrated learning and individual learning paths to develop functional literacy and critical thinking skills. His approach also included practical and work-related topics, as well as outdoor learning and experiments. While the older generation of teachers sometimes struggled, his students trained a younger cohort of teachers in this spirit.

The early kindergarten teachers were also professionally trained by the leading Estonian pedagogue Carl Heinrich Niggol. Many studied in Europe and incorporated the latest approaches developed by educational trailblazers such as Maria Montessori. Inspired by the German pedagogue Friedrich Fröbel, kindergarten was play-based and influenced by the Estonian tradition of song, nursery rhymes, dance, and crafts.

RESISTANCE THROUGH EDUCATION

While much had been achieved in 20 years of Estonian independence, these ideas were suppressed after the Soviet occupation in 1945. It was no shock to Estonians. Teachers had heard their parents' stories of life under Russification. In 1945, however, education leaders in Estonia managed to successfully make the case that public education in Estonian should continue. For a country whose population was nearly completely literate, changing the language of instruction would undermine the quality of education. What's more, on paper, the Soviet Union supported the autonomy of all nations.

So education in Estonia became organised in a parallel system, with Estonian-language schools in place alongside new Russian-language schools that followed the standard curricula taught in most Soviet republics. The number of Russian schools was initially small but grew fast because of an active migration policy. However, most schools continued to teach in Estonian. The curriculum was a translated and adapted programme developed by the Estonian Socialist Republic. It lasted one year longer and included special courses in Estonian history and literature. These courses looked ideologically appropriate from the outside: they described the hard work of Estonian peasants under German rule, the harsh punishments they faced, and the hypocrisy of the Church. But people who had lived in a free country knew how to read between the lines, and teachers deliberately taught the material in this way too. Soviet Estonian literature and poetry have many layers and sometimes sharp sarcastic humour, which a skilful teacher can use as they will.

Meanwhile, the children of the Russian-speaking migrants who came from all over the

Soviet Union to enjoy Estonia's "Western" way of life were educated separately in the parallel system. They lived in their Soviet World. The same uniform texts and curricula were followed from Karelia on the Finnish border to Siberia thousands of kilometres to the east.

The Soviet system of terror and repression did not tolerate opposition, so teachers in Estonian-speaking schools played the game and kept up appearances as "beetroots" (red through and through). But really most were "radishes" (red on the outside, white on the inside). After the occupation, some pupils of Käis and Niggol were killed, others were sent to Siberia, and some fled as refugees to Western countries. But most stayed in Estonia and continued their work as teachers and teacher trainers. Soviet education required all teachers to take a one-month training course every five years and these courses were opportunities to pass on many of the old ideas and methods to a new generation of teachers. Thus strong communities of practice where the best didactic ideas were learned and shared continued to exist.

In kindergarten, Estonian teachers enjoyed an even better situation. In the 1950s, the Soviet curriculum was translated into Estonian. But from 1968, a special programme was developed by local experts, many of whom were women who had studied under Niggol in the 1920s. Their programme was ostensibly prescriptive, decorated with red quotes and dedicated to topics such as Lenin's childhood and the "friendship of all workers", but the true emphasis was on the approach. Concepts such as developmentally appropriate learning, the value of play, and the importance of physical education, music, and crafts were central.

In the 1980s, a Soviet period of Russification began. The Estonian-minded minister of education was replaced by a Russian-minded official. The number of Russian lessons was increased, and translated Soviet kindergarten material began to be introduced. But by the time it was printed in 1987, it was already too late. The Singing Revolution had already begun.

In Estonia, the Singing Revolution refers to the events that helped pave the way for the fall of the Soviet Union and the restoration of independence. Across the Baltics, public festivals and demonstrations, often organised around environmental causes, where traditional and newly written songs, were sung emerged as key moments of resistance. Teachers were one of the groups able to organise most quickly in the window opened by these events. The first congress of teachers was held in 1987. The ideas discussed there around competency-based and integrated education match the concepts referred to today as 21st-century skills, but correspond just as closely to the ideas developed by Estonian pedagogues such as Käis in the early 20th century.

Teachers were among the first actors to seize the freedom of the Singing Revolution. I was a pupil in Year 7 when the Singing Revolution began. My literature teacher had always been "state loyal" and followed the official curriculum, but she also taught us to love literature and read between the lines. So while my first essay that year was "Why I honour Pavel Korchagin", about the protagonist of Nikolai Ostrovsky's Soviet classic *How the Steel Was Tempered*, my last was "What does it mean to be Estonian". Around the same time, my history teacher began to introduce the class to the history of other countries behind the Iron Curtain, such as Poland, Hungary, and Romania. They began to teach the topics that they truly felt to be important. Estonian schools thus became free before the country itself.

EDUCATION AFTER INDEPENDENCE

In the immediate aftermath of independence in 1991, there were no public curricula. As developing them takes time, schools and kindergarten were free to develop as they wished. Most schools continued with strong subject-based teaching, which was quite good in Soviet schools too, especially in mathematics and science, but added newly (re-)discovered ideas of directed enquiry learning, active learning, and freshly awakened national spirit.

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, Estonia, small and agile, was open to information and innovation. From 1994 on, the International Step by Step Association began training Estonian teachers to create child-centred learning environments with flexible classrooms and apply democratic approaches. The older generation was happy to discover how similar the ideas were to those that Käis had introduced almost a century earlier.

Many of the reforms introduced by Estonia in this period proved to be ahead of their time. The idea of general competencies, such as problem solving and teamwork, was brought into the general curriculum in 1996. The educational attainments of countries such as Canada and Finland were an inspiration, but Estonia's success was built on the initiative and readiness that had already been demonstrated by teachers at the grassroots. The general curriculum supported their independence, giving schools both the freedom and the obligation to develop their own plans. Communities of practice, where teachers can learn new methods of instruction that are both proven and innovative, were already strong during the Soviet period. However, they have since taken on a successful new guise in the form of professional learning communities – not so much learning from experts as being a specialist in the field of teaching and sharing your expertise with colleagues.

ESTONIA MAY NOT BE STRONG, BUT IT CAN PLAY SMART

In the background of this progress was Estonia's investment in digital policy, especially digital education. The government's Tiger Leap programme equipped schools with computers and trained teachers to use them effectively in the classroom. Today, computers are widely used from kindergarten on and Estonian children learn to code from an early age.

REASONS FOR SUCCESS

So why are Estonian schools at the top of the PISA rankings? If someone knew the whole answer, it could possibly be multiplied and used everywhere. The reasons can be distilled into a few elements.

A first aspect is an approach to education that values all children. Classes are organised in a student-centred way, which means that the aim is to find what they are good at and enjoy, bringing out the best in them. Education is also age appropriate. Compulsory school only starts at age 7, while early education is based on play. Teaching is organised along the lines of integrated learning, especially in the early and primary years, where different subject areas are combined around specific themes and projects.

The second strength of the Estonian system is the large degree of autonomy afforded to teachers and education institutions. The state trusts its educational professionals, and the curriculum is only minimally prescriptive. The external monitoring system, known in many countries as "inspection", is instead a system of educational consultation. Used in cases of need, this consultation is led by teacher communities and often organised through professional learning communities.

The third aspect is critical: the Estonian education system is based on equity. The general education system in Estonia is free, and parents do not face hidden costs. The number of private kindergartens and schools is increasing, but these also contribute to keeping the public system on

A LONG HISTORY OF FOREIGN RULE – FIRST BY GERMANS, THEN SWEDES, THEN RUSSIANS – HELPED PRODUCE SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

its toes. What's more, the school system does not segregate pupils based on ability but keeps pupils together in their learning path. The only form of segregation that exists is between Estonian-language and Russian-language schools. Finally, Estonia is not without income or wealth inequality, but the gap between the richest and poorest is not comparable to some other countries and Estonia never really developed a class society.

Estonia's size and history are also part of the story. The population of the country is around 1.3 million people, of whom 1 million are Estonian speakers and the remainder Russian speakers. This means that Estonia is the smallest language community in Europe that handles its affairs in all areas of life, from the machinery of government and education to PhD level to a legal system and a literary and artistic culture. This is a source of both pride and opportunities for self-development for all of Estonia's citizens. The country's size also allows and obliges it to be flexible, as seen in its early adoption of digital technology. Estonia may not be strong, but it can play smart.

The final element to stress is early childhood education and care. Estonian mothers have the right to three years of maternity leave, during which their employers must guarantee their position. For the first 18 months, they receive a full salary (unless it is very high, but that is not a "problem" for most Estonian mothers). Later on, almost all children attend high-quality early years education provided by the state. The cost is reasonable, and families on low incomes can apply for financial support. These kindergartens offer a place to be a child in the time of childhood, to learn through discovery in a friendly environment and be immersed in Estonian culture through songs, nursery rhymes, and dances, as has been the way since the time of Niggol and his students. Visiting an Estonian kindergarten, you will not see school-like lessons, but rather active play, arts, and music.

SEEING THE LIGHT

For centuries, Estonians have seen education as a tool for a better life, self-improvement, and enlightenment. Play-based early years combined with quality learning later have formed a platform for an internationally recognised education system. The state avoids dictating methodology and so learning can be student centred. Learning autonomy at the student level avoids over-testing and helps learners fulfil their potential.

Estonian education is also based on a certain element of positive nationalism. It is a small country, so it needs to support all its students to succeed. Its size also means that Estonia operates on the level of possibility: to make

Estonia possible, everyone needs to play their part. A long history of foreign rule – first by Germans, then Swedes, then Russians – helped produce survival strategies. Passed down through the generations, Estonia was forced to be innovative, sometimes in hidden ways. Today this heritage has made Estonia the home of tech start-ups such as Skype and Wise. The combination of Estonia's early switch to digital and student-centred learning also paid off during the pandemic, and many teachers were able to draw on pre-existing experience.

Still, the Estonian education system is not perfect. Teacher and school autonomy can also lead to stagnation. Some teachers may be experts in one subject but otherwise reluctant to teach new skills or try different approaches to learning and assessment. The situation in Russian-language schools is worse. Their teachers also enjoy much freedom, and many of them use Russian texts that present a propagandistic view of politics and history, including about Estonia's place in the Russian Empire. Despite state resources, language learning is often a problem and their students do not always gain a full grasp of Estonian.

Education in Estonia has benefitted somewhat from public investment over the last 30 years. The Tiger Leap programme introduced digital technology to the classroom, and some schools and kindergartens have been renovated to offer excellent physical environments. Yet teachers' salaries remain among the lowest in Europe, damaging the attractiveness of the profession. The war in Ukraine has underlined the most important values for a society. Now the Estonian government has invested in defence, education should be the next goal.

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CRITICAL UNDERSTANDING
THE CHANGING POLITICS OF SCIENCE

AN INTERVIEW WITH
ÉTIENNE KLEIN
BY
EDOUARD GAUDOT

France was once the country of the Enlightenment. Today, it is witnessing a widespread and growing public distrust in science, to an extent unique in Europe. Argument and critique are key to democratic debate. But when you cannot agree on the facts, you soon run into trouble. Edouard Gaudot sat down with physicist Étienne Klein to discuss changing public attitudes to science and the role of education.

EDOUARD GAUDOT: It seems that public scepticism has been growing for at least 15 years, a process which has only been accelerated by the pandemic. Are people losing trust in science?

ÉTIENNE KLEIN: A 2021 report by the French Council of Economic Analysis took stock of how the Covid-19 crisis in Europe has impacted the economy, mental wellbeing, and trust in science.[1] Interestingly, trust in science has remained at 90 per cent. This figure must be taken with a pinch of salt, because it is not clear exactly what it refers to, but it is a high number nevertheless.

The question "Do you trust scientists?" can be understood in several ways. The first would be: do you believe scientists are being truthful, and if so, does this apply to all scientists or just the ones you prefer to listen to? The second meaning would be: do you trust science as a knowledge process capable of generating objective, "scientific" results? The third aspect would be: do you trust that science can meet the challenges we are facing in terms of ecology, climate, biodiversity, and so on?

FR

This article is available in French on the *Green European Journal* website.

ÉDUQUER À L'ESPRIT CRITIQUE : LE POLITIQUE ET LE SAVANT

Étienne Klein s'entretien avec Edouard Gaudot à propos de la vérité dans l'espace public, la démocratisation de la science et les incertitudes inhérentes à la recherche.

1 Yann Algan & Daniel Cohen (2021). "The French in the Time of Covid-19: An Economy and Society Facing the Health Risk". *French Council of Economic Analysis*, Note 66. October 2021. Paris.

Regardless of one's understanding of the question, trust in science has remained more or less stable in most European countries. The exception is France, where it fell by 20 points in 18 months – a huge drop. What is the reason for this "cultural exception"? Is it how science and research were spotlighted during the pandemic? Were the debates too focused on personalities? Were controversies artificially manufactured?

It seems to me that it is not so much that we don't trust the experts. It is rather that more, and new, voices are gaining exposure. These voices would not have received a platform a few years ago. Is this some kind of democratisation in our relationship to knowledge and science? Or is it the result of confusion over what science is? My hypothesis is that we have confused science with research. The idea of doubt, which is inherent to research, has come to colonise the very idea of science.

It would represent, paradoxically, a certain progress of the critical spirit.

Critical thinking can be good and bad. Good critical thinking is when you subject your thought to criticism. All true thought is critical. "To think is to think against your brain," said Gaston Bachelard. But if you are constantly reinforcing existing patterns of thought through confirmation bias, you can no longer really be said to be thinking. The critical spirit that I see, particularly in online comments, is more about criticising the thought of others – not your own.

How do you distinguish between the healthy questioning of information and an unhealthy conspiratorial train of thought?

We cannot immediately speak of conspiracy theories because there is a form of conspiracy theory that is hyper-rational rather than irrational. It plays the game of minimal causality: a very small number of causes explain all the phenomena before us. I once spoke to a conspiracy theorist and I was taken by their very skilful use of scientific argument that reversed the burden of proof. When asked to prove that there was a conspiracy, they replied: "Prove to me that there wasn't one," which was materially impossible. They argued that the absence of evidence is not evidence of the absence, which is also true, of course!

In his book *Truth and Truthfulness* (2002), Bernard Williams explains that two contradictory currents of thought exist in postmodern societies like ours, which, by a perverse effect, instead of fighting each other, feed each other. The first he called the "pleasure of truthfulness". It is the idea that our European societies are educated and informed, and therefore the public does not want to be fooled by the discourse of power, elites, institutions, or lobbies. Obviously, a desire not to be fooled

is perfectly healthy in a democracy. It should be encouraged, because it is based on the idea that there is an almost intrinsic link between knowledge and the "Republic".

This healthy desire for truthfulness should aim at identifying truth. What Williams shows is that, in reality, it triggers a generalised critical spirit across society that undoes the idea that there are verified truths. As soon as we come across truth, we ask ourselves whether it is true. Are there not contextual factors at play? Has this information been manipulated? The desire for truthfulness thus feeds a denial of truth, which in turn creates mistrust of the powerful: of political, institutional, and expert discourses.

This dynamic had been identified before the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic exposed the limits of popular science, generalised for the mass audience; it only works for those for whom it works, and many among the public have not had direct contact with scientific arguments. They drink from other sources. When I say that, I do not want to give the impression of having an elitist discourse. It's not that there are scientists on one side and the general public on the other. Scientists themselves are competent only in and around their own discipline.

Moreover, I am not defending an academic conception of democracy; a citizen who knows nothing about science is no less a "good citizen" than somebody interested in it. But what worries me is that there is a part of the public that can be easily manipulated and deceived. The question is, how can we reduce this risk? If we want a proper democratic conversation about technology, we'll need to make sure that activism and participation are also backed up by prior knowledge.

At the heart of the articulation between science and power is the question of how to link scientific knowledge about facts such as biodiversity loss and climate change to public discourse and eventual action.

This is exactly what concerns me, and I don't have any solutions. On matters of technology and ecology, my observation is that activism and competence are not necessarily correlated. In France at least, having a clear position, pro- or anti- something, seems to absolve one from the obligation of educating oneself about the matter. We hardly know what GMOs are, nor how nuclear reactors work, nor by what miracle our telephones send messages to the other side of the world. But when a pollster asks us about these subjects, we do not hesitate to answer yes or no.

How can we explain this readiness? Well, we're not making a judgment on the technologies themselves but the images with which we associate them. All technologies produce a "halo effect", as the philosopher

Gilbert Simondon pointed out: they radiate a symbolic light, sometimes positive, sometimes negative, which goes beyond their own reality and spreads in its surroundings, obscuring perception of the technology as it is.

Behind this observation lies one of the limits of the Encyclopaedist project of the Enlightenment. They believed that the more technical objects there are within the population, the better the general understanding of the scientific principles underlying them would become. Technology would be a vector of pedagogy: it would teach, by its very presence, the sciences from which it came. Today, this is simply not the case. Even an engineering student will struggle to explain how a mobile phone works, and how a message can be sent instantly from a miraculous screen to anywhere in the world. A magical relationship to technical objects thus develops. Their ease of use is completely independent of the knowledge that we have of their functioning.

In the preface to his book *Le Contrat naturel*, philosopher Michel Serres deplored our increasingly divergent educational trajectories. On the one hand, there is education in science and the description of the world and, on the other, education in the human sciences and prescription for the world.

This is less true in Germany, thanks to the promotion of technical education and lifelong learning. But in France, there is a kind of determination that is made at a very young age. The sciences and mathematics are used to select an elite who will populate the amphitheatres of the *Grandes Écoles*, when we should be more concerned about the general educational level of the population.

Until recently, you could stop doing mathematics in France at 16. You try it out, and if you don't do well then that's it for life. I've taught different types of audiences and I can tell you that these are glass ceilings. They prevent certain people, however intelligent, from ever moving past the traumas of school and believing that they are even capable of thinking about science.

In an ideal world, what would the European education system look like? What should we have learned by the time we leave school?

The question of what to teach students is delicate, because all knowledge is available on the internet to anyone who wants it. What can we teach them that they can't find out for themselves?

I think that teaching should therefore focus on learning. You should learn to calculate, to write, to understand, to reason. Alongside laying the foundations to learn later by oneself, we should try to distil what Einstein called the "eroticism of problems", a way of presenting things that creates an addiction to

emotions, stories, characters, and paradoxes around knowledge. It would be a way to exploit the deep, insular joy that arises in the mind when you finally grasp something you have been making an effort to understand. Understanding, finding the key to a discovery, or verifying an elementary physical law: this is what moves you and takes you away from your usual ways of being in the world. Without it, we'd be left with poor knowledge that is hard to even distinguish from beliefs.

This is why, a few years ago, I suggested to [former French Education Minister] Luc Ferry that we should teach each year, from kindergarten to the end of primary school, the story of a discovery. The real story, not the legend: what were the arguments, why at one point did almost everyone agree? This class would be compulsory, but it would not be graded. This would make it possible to learn, from specific examples, the difference between knowledge and belief.

Can we democratise science? Can we have a citizen science without impoverishing science?

I do not like to speak of the "democratisation of science". It is so ambiguous. This formulation suggests that science is inherently democratic or could become so. However, it is not, nor does it want to be. Scientific results cannot be determined by a vote. David Hume said that truth is the one limit to the sovereignty of the people. If a large majority of people decide that Earth is at the centre of the solar system and that the sun revolves around it, it will not make any difference to the real motion of the planet around the sun.

The right of citizens to ask questions, investigate, hold opinions, and challenge researchers and governments nevertheless remains absolute. Their questions should be answered as honestly as possible. But having an opinion is not equivalent to knowing whether a scientific statement is true or false.

Moreover, the independence of scientific truth takes nothing away from individual freedom: neither Newton, nor Darwin, nor Einstein were potential dictators. On the contrary, it protects freedom, at least in a democracy. Because when power lies, deceives, or is mistaken, the individual can claim this truth to contest it.

What about AIDS research, for example? Immense progress has been made as a result of patient pressure.

Yes, but this is participatory science. France has done the same thing for biodiversity, with censuses of endangered species, for example. These are people who are not in the laboratories but who help to develop knowledge through personal work that is collected, pooled, and then analysed by others. Patients with a new

disease, therefore partly unknown, acquire knowledge, which can help doctors, steering them towards avenues that they may not spontaneously have considered.

When we speak, admittedly wrongly, of democratising science, we are indeed talking about democratising the power that science provides.

Yes. Encouraging people to take part in science is a great initiative. It allows us to understand its various methodologies.

In this regard, the pandemic was a historic opportunity to explain scientific methodologies to the general public in real time. For example, we could have explained in a very accessible way what constitutes a double-blind trial, a randomised trial, the placebo effect, or the appropriate use of statistics, which can be very counter-intuitive. Remember Angela Merkel's patient, now-famous explanation of the "exponential function" at a press conference. That sort of education should have been on the evening news everywhere.

THE INDEPENDENCE OF SCIENTIFIC TRUTH TAKES NOTHING AWAY FROM INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM

Ultimately, can we entrust government to scientists?

No. Science produces knowledge, but it also produces uncertainty – a very special type of uncertainty. We cannot know from scientific knowledge alone what to do with it. Biology has shown us how to make GMOs, but it doesn't tell us if we should or shouldn't do so.

Science today is no longer embedded in the idea of progress. The word "progress" itself is used less and less. It has almost disappeared from public discourse, to be replaced by the word "innovation". One could say that this switch did not change anything, because these two words are, in a sense, almost synonymous. But on examination, it appears that our discourse on innovation is a radical departure from the rhetoric of progress. To believe in progress was to agree to sacrifice the personal present in the name of a certain idea,

credible and desirable, of a collective future. But for such a sacrifice to have meaning, there needs to be a symbolic attachment to the world and its future. Is it because such a connection is lacking today that the word progress has disappeared or is cowering behind the concept of innovation, now on the agenda of all research policies?

If you listen to a lot of today's discourse, what is most important is not innovating to invent another world but preventing the disintegration of the one we have. It is the critical state of the present that is invoked and not a certain configuration of the future, as if we were no longer capable of enunciating an attractive common purpose. This argument is based on the idea of a time that corrupts, a time that damages beings and situations. Yet such a conception turns its back on the spirit of the Enlightenment, for which time is, on the contrary, a constructor and accomplice of our freedom – provided, of course, we make the effort to invest in a certain representation of the future.

It is up to citizens to determine what they wish to build with new technologies. Many are calling for debate. But the very idea of debate in a world of polarised opinions, with little knowledge, is difficult to put into practice. How can we organise instructive debate involving citizens and experts? Where do we draw the line between popular science, citizen participation, and political power? What we need is for competent people, who are generally moderate, to get involved wholeheartedly.

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GREEN EUROPEAN JOURNAL	**Summer 2022** Printed in Belgium by a CO_2 neutral company 100% recycled paper
PUBLISHED BY	GEF
EDITORIAL TEAM	Jamie Kendrick Beatrice White Seden Anlar Jennifer Kwao Ben Ryan
EDITORIAL BOARD	Natalie Bennett Benedetta De Marte Edouard Gaudot Roderick Kefferpütz Adam Ostolski
PROOFREADING	Katy Nicholson
GRAPHIC DESIGN	Claire Allard www.klar.graphics
ILLUSTRATIONS	Elise Vandeplancke elisevandeplancke.be
CREATIVE SUPPORT	Klaas Verplancke
ISSN	2684-4486
ISBN	978-9-49-051508-9

GREEN EUROPEAN FOUNDATION

The Green European Foundation is a European-level political foundation whose mission is to contribute to a lively European sphere of debate, political education, and to foster greater citizen participation in European politics.

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This publication can be ordered from
www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu

This publication has been produced with the financial support of the European Parliament. The European Parliament is not responsible for the content of this project.

A previous version of this issue contained an incorrect image in the article "Schools for Thought". The image has now been corrected.

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MAKING OUR MINDS

UNCOVERING THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION

Our world is in motion yet our education systems remain fossilised. Education should be a liberating force, but it can also exacerbate hierarchies, divisions, and inequality. This edition asks what an education system that truly equips people for the challenges of our age would look like. An education that incorporates the values of sustainability, peace, and justice and fosters critical thinking, autonomy, and resilience as building blocks with which people can construct an understanding of themselves and the world. Beyond recognising that education is always political, it uncovers the ongoing battles over education, its form and its content, and goes further to explore the alternatives. Greens and progressives stand for an inclusive, egalitarian, and democratising project. If such a society is to be built, the power of education will need to be harnessed. More than anything, it will have to unlock the capacities for imagination, creativity, and curiosity so often associated with childhood to help us navigate the future ahead of us and reach a better world.

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EUROPEAN
JOURNAL

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ISSN 2684-4486
ISBN 978-9-49-051508-9