
Adult Education and European Identity^[1]

OSKAR NEGTE

Department of Sociology,
University of Hannover, Germany

ABSTRACT Europe is coming together. This is a historic project; for the first time in modern history, will and consciousness are used for bringing political, social and cultural unity to the European continent. In this process lifelong learning and hence adult education are gaining in importance. The European project takes place in an age characterised by radical changes and crises in work, civil society and the human existence as such. In this situation citizens need new key skills to cope. Also, identities need to be strengthened and reshaped and new types of solidarity need to be developed. Learning must not be restricted to the acquisition of technical and vocational skills, but will increasingly become learning to cope with the world and to establish new hierarchies of values which enable individuals to create a democratic Europe. To achieve this goal adult education must cease to be the responsibility of the individual and rather become an institutionalised and shared responsibility.

Europe as a Project

For the first time in modern history, will and consciousness are used for bringing political, social and cultural unity to the European continent. It is neither self-evident nor a natural phenomenon. For 500 years this continent has been a theatre of bloody wars and harsh competition. Europe has now become one of the most amazing historical projects being constructed. Peoples and governments that were fighting against one another in military alliances in the first half of the twentieth century, leading to 50 million deaths and the commission of unspeakable mass crimes by individual states, have willingly and consciously set out on the taxing path of establishing rules to govern a social peace based on mutual recognition and equality.

This is not meant as a pathetic exaggeration but as a factual statement of the situation. This historic project is unique because the two attempts to unite Europe by force which served the exploitative interests of a dominant great power, the France of Napoleon and the Germany of Hitler, were attended by untold numbers of victims and the protectionist reinforcement of nation-states. The pathology of the nation-state is crumbling, and even de Gaulle's peaceful notion of a 'Europe des patries' is no more than a faded memory for the younger generation of Europeans.

In his *Philosophy of History*, Hegel says that the only thing we can learn from history is that we learn nothing from it (Hegel, 1994, p. 19). This bitter realisation is usually apposite. But it is not the whole truth; what is happening in Europe at present must be seen as historic learning. Certain governments and outstanding individuals have given decisive momentum to the unification of Europe, and have set the political course. But if its peoples had not gone through an underlying process of learning, if they had not revised their accustomed world views and perceptions of potential enemies, if individual concepts of life had not undergone fundamental change, such a unification project would have had no firm foundations.

An example of such changes in awareness is the fact that the Finnish President, Ahtisaari, made a successful contribution as a negotiator and peacemaker in an area of conflict far on the southern

fringes of Europe, in Yugoslavia in the late 1990s. That is a hopeful symbol, a sign that the small countries of Europe are able to gain greater credibility and trust among many people than the European Great Powers, whose history in the twentieth century is burdened with colonial adventures, war and obsession with race. This very example demonstrates that the virtue of solidarity throughout Europe has taken root. I regard a different element as the key, however. There can be no lasting peaceful settlement in Europe if new threats of violence are looming on its borders. We know that ethnic cleansing is largely occurring where old power struggles between ethnic groups are being revived, where the authoritarian state that ruled vast territories in the name of Soviet communism is collapsing along with its satellite system.

It should be remembered, however, that it took centuries for the wars of religion and tribal vendettas to come to an end in Europe. The edicts of tolerance which removed political meaning from tribal allegiance and religious opinion, and gave greater recognition to actual behaviour than to opinion, were an essential part of the civilising process of bourgeois society. President Ahtisaari had good reason to involve Russia in his peace mission; it will not be the last time that this is necessary, and perhaps the Russian option is more important in the long term for the peace of Europe than, for example, the admission of Turkey.

I will freely admit that I had doubts about the sense of military intervention in Yugoslavia, but I was unable to make alternative suggestions to my friends in the federal government. I should nonetheless like to pick out one lesson born of experience: that violence achieves nothing. Not even counter-violence, for it too causes an astonishing amount of destruction to property and human relations.

Therefore my reflections on the opportunities and requirements of a European civil society primarily concern a level *below* that of the formal provisions of relevant policy agreements between governments and the contractual niceties of the nexus between economic and fiscal affairs. To me, Europe is a working project, and it may be sensible to begin the unification agenda with monetary union, using money as a cold medium of human interchange right at the outset, in order to accelerate the creation of one society. The very name 'euro' may contribute to changes in awareness.

I am sceptical, however, about whether the agreements reached under their various names – Rome, Maastricht, Paris, Berlin, and so on – while absolutely necessary as individual steps, are sufficient in themselves to bring about anything approaching a general and well-founded European consciousness. There therefore arises, in my view, the vital problem of how these government decisions, and the measures and proposed legislation of the European Parliament and the EU Commission in Brussels, are to be internalised, processed and accepted in people's everyday lives. In a word, how will they become the raw material of critical judgment? We are, after all, talking about collective learning processes of a quite particular nature. They are not restricted merely to the level of factual knowledge about Europe. People will quickly learn how to handle euros and, in the long term, the laws and regulations of the EU Commission will also present no problem. But the dangerously low voter turnout at European Parliament elections, as well as the abstention of considerable numbers of voters in elections in Germany, clearly demonstrate a reluctance to participate, to take an interest and become involved in the fortunes of the community. This directs our attention forcefully to a contradiction that we must address and resolve if we wish to found a European civil society that is free from violence.

It is a fundamental question which everyone in Europe asks about life, and must legitimately ask: What do I gain, in addition to what I have already, from joining in a European community and treating it as a necessary part of my existence? The answer need not be material benefits, but it must be more than the removal of passport controls at borders.

In this article I single out five critical issues as specific areas for work and action. The global challenge is not simply that posed by the stock exchange in Tokyo or New York, but relates to quite different problems: How do we shape and preserve our ecological system? How do we equip the new generation to dispose of the refuse that we leave behind, and to pay off the debts that we have incurred? These are critical issues which we have created ourselves, which have come about at the heart of societies of a high order of development; they are areas of extremely tense conflict in which there will be a growing potential for violence unless they are resolved.

These critical issues are to be met, in degrees of severity that vary from region to region and at differing stages of evolution, in every European country. They are not merely the leftovers of the nation-states, and they can no longer be attributed to a single, specific cause in the varied cultural landscape of Europe. I should like to emphasise strongly that the debate about the economic situation, and the outlook for business and growth, give the impression that human happiness and misery hang by a silken thread from the economy. Viviane Forrester rightly called attention to the paradoxicality of the present situation in speaking of the 'terror of the economy' (Forrester, 1999). Day and night we worry about economic concerns although it is plain to all that our societies are overflowing with wealth and that the goods which we have accumulated prevent us from thinking about the aims of culture, the purpose of humanity and consequent processes of learning.

We live in a world of radical change: traditional values and directions are no longer taken for granted without question, while new, reliable and binding values and directions have yet to be found. They are being sought, however, with the result that this is an age of anomie, as the French sociologist Durkheim has called this in-between world (Durkheim, 1984), an age of intensive search. In such an in-between world in search of a direction, huge efforts are required of the adult generation in order to cope with the vast amount of learning called for by the following critical issues.

Globalisation, Capital and Civil Society

One critical issue is currently referred to by the term *globalisation*. At no time in modern history has so much changed in so short a time as in the last 15 years. In a time of peace, that is, rather than war. An entire imperial system has collapsed, and individual peoples have freely returned to the European scene. The simplistic division of the world into a First World, a Second World and a Third World has vanished; we are witnesses to this process of upheaval, but has it really penetrated into people's consciousness and lifestyles?

The factors governing the new order that have remained are, first, the logic of the marketplace and capitalism and, second, the western military bloc. When the Soviet Union existed as a powerful reality, the image of a free and more just society in the West was alive. The authoritarian system in the East served as a distinctive warning: we did not want our society to look like that! Democratic socialists, as well as liberals and conservatives, worked actively to create rights to social liberty and to build up the post-war social systems. In the heads and hearts of many people in Europe, a democratic civil society provided the sole firm foundation, even for those who organised themselves in socialist parties and trade unions.

Now we have to learn anew. The military threat to our existence from outside has disappeared, and the peaceful laws of capital accumulation and the market are rising while the social systems of all western countries are at the same time being turned upside down, cut back and radically transformed. Yet at the same time, wealth production in these countries has grown immensely. What has been going on? The crucial change is in the relationship between capital and state: the state founded on taxation is dying, and major companies in Germany, such as Daimler and Allianz Insurance, proudly pay no more taxes. Although they make extensive use of infrastructures, the German education system and transport facilities, they pay less and less into the common purse.

It is not globalisation that is new about the present form of capitalism; what is totally new is that capital can operate with complete freedom for the first time in history, without encountering borders or barriers. Bourgeois society and capitalism were never identical, since the development of a bourgeois civil society consisted in limiting the effects of capitalist and market thinking, but when neither the state nor the power of trade union opposition is any longer capable of protecting the basic requirements of a civil society based on tolerance and rights to social liberty, and when those with economic power decline to take on any responsibility for the economy of the entire house, for the common weal, on their own initiative, then the whole of Europe is in the gravest danger. It is necessary, as is evident from the increasingly loud calls made in all countries, for economic activity once more to be brought within the bounds of cultural aims and purposes. We are dealing not with an economic crisis, but with a crisis in the cultural significance of economic activities.

Only a European solution can be found to this critical issue, since individual states are being blackmailed by the argument of the needs of globalisation: those with economic power say that they will leave Germany or France if they are obliged to pay taxes. They may certainly go on looking for ways of avoiding taxes, but not in the European economic area. The need for such changes calls for active learning, as it is difficult to explain to people in Europe that the powerful are paying less and less into the common purse, while the powerless are paying ever more.

The Crisis of Work

The civil society that we want cannot be achieved without a restructuring of work and paid employment. This is the second critical issue that we have to consider. It has been known for a long time, at least since the early 1980s, that the principle no longer applies whereby today's profits are the investments of tomorrow and the jobs of the day after tomorrow. Since 1980, profits in Germany have increased by about 100% and wages and salaries have risen only to a certain degree; but unemployment has more than doubled during this time of economic prosperity and long-term wage restraint.

Such huge mass unemployment as is presently seen in Europe is not a problem that can be solved by technical adjustments; it touches on many issues of culture, morality and the ethics of responsibility in a civil society. At a European employment conference held in Hannover in 1999 a depressing finding was published: 50,000 people were becoming unemployed in Europe each day. At the same time, academics and politicians are eager to declare in front of television cameras that many new jobs are also being created. This is true; the whole structure of employment is in turmoil. But it is not enough. The wave of rationalisation brought about by microelectronics is affecting all sections of society, including the service industries. While one new job may be created, two or three are destroyed. We can change little about this epoch-making trend if we go on leaving social development with almost religious faith to the logic and laws of the market and capital.

The human problems of mass unemployment go deeper. They affect individual people's lives. We know from surveys of the unemployed that personal identity, social recognition and individual dignity are still essentially defined by work, at least in the European context. It is necessary to stress forcefully that unemployment is an act of violence, an attack on physical and spiritual integrity, on the freedom from bodily harm of the people concerned; it is theft and dispossession of skills and qualities which have generally been acquired through a laborious and costly process of education within the family, and at school and college, but which are suddenly cut off from the opportunity to be applied in society, and are in danger of rotting and causing serious personality disturbances. The Berlin artist Heinrich Zille once said that people can just as surely be killed by losing the roof over their heads as by an axe.

In this critical issue we have to learn anew about work and unemployment. The popular cries of lean production, lean management, just-in-time delivery, and so on suggest a process of sensible rationalisation of production and trade, but they disguise the reality. If companies rationalise, they push the costs saved on to others. Every government department is proud of making savings, but the burden of cost simply moves elsewhere. Money saved, for example, in education, family support, primary socialisation, and so on, means more money spent a few years later on police, prisons and the building of psychiatric units.

I am therefore arguing for a carefully considered balancing of the economy of the entire house (cf. Negt, 2001, pp. 308ff.) This will produce a balance sheet that is quite different from what is produced merely by totalling the balance sheets of every individual enterprise. In this economy of the entire house (and I am thinking of the Greek concept of *oikos*), categories such as education – learning and training – take priority. I do not mean only general education but also vocational training, although I doubt whether vocational training alone will enable us to resolve the critical issue of unemployment.

In many companies, including the service industries, a radical 'deskilling' of jobs is taking place. As Richard Sennett shows in his challenging book *The Corrosion of Character* (Sennett, 1998), flexibility (job fragmentation or the combining of several different jobs) is increasingly leading to the fragmentation of human lives, especially family relationships, the very resources that have nourished capitalism until now.

It is not only young people, who may not yet have had a job at all, who are affected, but to an increasing extent older people as well. Can there still be any doubt about the huge cultural importance of adult education at such times? When people cannot understand the fragmentation of their lives, when they remain unaware of it, there is a palpable danger of their declining into psychiatric conditions such as depression and loss of a feeling of self-worth, and into illness, alcoholism and drug-dependency. We often behave as though the drugs problem had nothing to do with this difficult restructuring of employment. However, the problems that this leaves unresolved are the breeding ground for people's tendency to retreat from reality and to develop an addiction.

There are no quick practicable solutions. But I do believe it would be worthwhile to take this critical issue of work and unemployment seriously, so that we can reach a real decision as to whether we have a Europe-wide society that is culturally viable. One consideration I must point out: that the insane vision of a collective planned economy collapsed of its own accord; it was its own irrationality that brought this about. This is a good thing and was overdue. But it would be fatal to deduce from this that we can do without collective solutions to our self-induced problems. Democratic socialism and the European trade unions have a long tradition of fighting for a balance between private property and collective forms of living. A great cooperative movement grew up: production collectives, and self-help trading and loan organisations guided by solidarity, cooperation and mutual aid rather than profit. It developed further in Europe than in other parts of the world. I find it of great importance to preserve a collective memory of these social experiments for the future. Movements to found cooperatives are once again stirring, especially in Italy, and while they are certainly market-oriented, they are far from obsessed with mergers and acquisitions, or even with profit.

In Europe we have had in the past a vast range of social experiments, and will perhaps have yet more in the future, associating individual freedoms and independence with the need to safeguard the community. We must learn once again that while economic activity is necessary and jobs have to be secured, we should not lose sight of human goals. A European society needs a new ethic of responsibility for the community.

The Crisis of Social Life

A structural change in the relations between places of upbringing and education is taking place in Europe before our eyes. We may regret the fact that the old bourgeois family no longer exists; but it may be that this ideal type of family based on marriage, property and children as a viable unit did not exist before the fifteenth century and will no longer exist in the twenty-first century. The divorce rate is high in every country, and some children grow up with single parents. In the United States more than a third of all children and adolescents are living with only one parent. What interests me is where children in these circumstances learn the basic social skills that are so important for life in society. Where do people learn today to share and to compromise? Where do they experience absolute reliability and security? Without such essential virtues, a democratic society cannot remain stable in the long term. But this is just one aspect of growing up for the new generation. It is not only in Brazil or Thailand that masses of children are impoverished; the fragmentation of family relationships also means that child poverty has reached huge proportions even in a rich country such as Germany.

Cynics might say that if two thirds of a society are doing well, then it still has a firm basis. But this is false. When a third of the population is to all intents and purposes disconnected from a good, well-ordered society, there is not only the potential for unrest but also an enduring denial of the self-proclaimed values of justice of that society. Augustine, who lived during the decline of the Western Roman Empire, said once in his famous book *The City of God*: 'What are empires without justice but large bands of robbers?' (Augustine, 1950, Book IV, pp. 112-113). If we speak of a civil society, we imply the need for compensatory justice, and this means protection and care for those groups and classes in society that cannot help themselves because of their circumstances. The trade unions still have a historic task that is by no means accomplished.

If people's primary experiences are so fragmented but no one can grow up without close personal relationships and physical touch – that is, without human contact – we must look more closely at the social institutions that convey and provide opportunities to practise these social

virtues. In this connection I see an increasing role for schools, which have the task not only of teaching reading, writing and arithmetic, and familiarity with computers – the technical skills required in our culture – but also of fostering and structuring social and emotional learning. There is a need for a balance between cognitive, emotional and social learning processes. I have, incidentally, discovered on training courses for managers of major companies that emotional and social learning is not regarded as a superfluous addition even in those circles – on the contrary, it is absolutely necessary and is what makes factual knowledge stick.

There is nowadays so much inflated talk about the information and learning society that one becomes quite giddy. But this link between cognitive training and the development of personality in the sense of identity, purpose and social competence in intercourse with other people, including strangers, is crucial to learning in an information society. Where else are people to acquire the ground rules that will enable them to learn to learn? How will anyone who is not encouraged to indulge his or her curiosity in childhood and adolescence, anyone who has not experienced reliable relationships in childhood and adolescence, anyone for whom the primary institution of the family and the school are alien, cold institutions, be able to defend the democratic, civil community as though it were his or her own?

In all three critical issues discussed so far, I have set out to portray both dangers and solutions. That is the meaning of the Greek word from which 'crisis' is derived: *krino* means separating, dividing, distinguishing (judging), and also deciding. A crisis means a moment of radical change, in which there may be both fatal developments and renewal. I am banking on renewal, which is why I stress the issue of the community.

New Technology and Human Existence

This is a critical issue directly affecting the human condition; it goes to the core of the integrity and identity of human life. I refer to the altered relationship between technology, particularly medical techniques, and the growing importance of ethical issues arising from the fact that humanity sees itself with the aid of technical intervention as a kind of prosthetic god, as Sigmund Freud once appositely expressed it (Freud, 2005). It is not only the rapidly increasing prolongation of life which is bringing about progress in the history of our northern culture. The overcoming of diseases and the postponement of dying have been cultural, utopian ideals since ancient times. But we are entering a new stage. Growing old and dying with dignity are surely among the basic civilising attributes of a society that is proud of its cultural tradition. But if we do not wish to upset the contract between the generations, about which there is so much talk, then social wealth must be redistributed. Children and young people may have caring representatives in this world, but they have no real power. In this society, young people arouse attention only in two fields: as perpetrators of violence, and as consumers. Have we reached the point in Europe where we can take seriously and recognise their interests and needs as social and political beings? We are far from it. Care for the elderly in this society lies in their own hands, however; initiatives to make small reductions in pensions usually lead to considerable punishment by the electorate.

This is only one aspect associated with technology. The health service is the only sector in our societies where costs are consistently growing. There is even talk of a sixth Kondratieff, a long period of economic prosperity (named after the Russian economist of the 1920s; cf. Kondratieff, 1984), taking over from the age of microelectronics that has already exhausted its power of innovation. Medical techniques, on the other hand, gene technology, antenatal diagnostics, cloning and embryo technology, all these possible micro-interventions into the body and the very substance of the human species, have developed so spectacularly within a few decades that they are having a profound effect on our image of the human being. The Greek physician Hippocrates forbade the cutting of organs, and Kant said that only the removal of a diseased human organ was permissible, anything else degrading the human being to the level of material and infringing human dignity (Kant, 1996). Transplant technology means that people can more or less be rebuilt out of alien parts. Are we aware of what this means for our perception of integrity, for the human feeling of self-worth and personal identity?

We let all these processes continue as though they were a matter of course. We discuss the economic situation, company mergers and atomic power stations with great passion, and I am not

saying that these are unimportant. But out of public view, in realms of hidden reality, processes are taking place with the potential for interventions in the nature of human beings which would be an abuse of gene technology by those in power. A code of bioethics is therefore urgently needed, going beyond the boundaries of national borders. The manipulation of genes may certainly have a place in eliminating diseases. But the notion that a commercial company can intervene through gene technology in the inherited substance of a human being in order to produce individuals with specific characteristics can only be regarded as a nightmare. Yet it is far from unimaginable.

European regulation has specific tasks in this field. Laws are certainly necessary to forbid and punish such actions. But that is no longer enough. Europe must develop a cultural awareness that such misuse of the power of technology contradicts our understanding of a cultured, civil society. Some such ethical consensus is an essential requirement for a Europe that is free from violence, as Jürgen Habermas and Pierre Bourdieu have constantly suggested (Bourdieu, 1998; Habermas, 2001). Discussion of such an ethic is crucial to the shaping of life in Europe; the funding of such discussion and recommendations concerning such awareness should be on the agendas of political parties and trade unions. This is a real task for them. If they come to grips with such vital issues, they will have no need to worry about electors and members. The soil of right-wing radicalism is fertile: the seeds of violence grow best where problems and conflicts are unresolved.

It is true that once technologies are discovered, they cannot be forgotten again. It is therefore all the more urgent that people become culturally aware that such technologies can be rejected. This applies equally to atomic technology, which may be profitable as long as it is used economically. But it is no stain on the honour of a cultural community to decline things that are not really necessary for a satisfying standard of living, but which impinge on the very basis of our existence, on nature, on our physical integrity, and on the other creatures on earth. I am sure that a single massive explosion of the size of Chernobyl in the heart of Europe would have shut down nearly all atomic power stations in these latitudes. We need not, I believe, wait for such a collective misfortune. We can also learn from the mistakes of others.

Identity and Democracy

The epicentre of this critical issue is the balance between democracy and public life. To me, civil society is another expression for a functioning democratic society. I prefer the term democracy because it is unmistakably associated with a whole series of issues that have arisen during its history. Civil society sounds more neutral; but in Europe it has lost its opposite pole, which consisted originally of absolutist feudal regimes, and then authoritarian and militarised forms of society. Neither the land-owning classes nor the military have decisive influence in present-day Europe.

The issue of democracy is still on the European agenda. Here, too, we face radical change in the old institutions associated with the democratic polity – parliament, the division of powers into three, civilian control of the military, political parties and trade unions – all of which are involved in their visible forms of expression. Increasing numbers of people doubt whether all is well with these institutions and whether it makes sense to vote in elections in order to influence events as a whole. All constitutional organs may be functioning, but the question nonetheless has to be asked, and within the institutions there are growing feelings of discouragement, frustration and anxiety about life, and a desire to escape from these institutions and to go quite different ways; I see these as political black market fantasies.

Countries with widely differing democratic traditions are now expected to grow together in Europe. This requires these countries to come to terms with their own pasts. Some, such as Spain and Portugal, only joined the major democratic nations in the mid-1970s. Earlier, in the 1920s and 1930s, they had attained a high level of democracy, but Franco and Salazar are part of the past that must also be dealt with. In Germany, the wound which fascism inflicted on Europe has still not healed. In other countries that were victims, there is doubtless also much that is not forgotten.

However, this is not the main threat to democracy in Europe. I see another danger approaching: in the huge tension between growing globalisation and increasing individualisation, which are currently discerned as the two main trends by sociologists, vital intermediate levels are being threatened or destroyed. I would term this the need for viable units. By that I mean readily

comprehensible contexts in which people recognise themselves in their thoughts and actions, and find acknowledgement and confirmation in their personal and material environments. They may be neighbourhoods, trade union centres of communication, or public places where young people meet. Where such viable units (organisations and institutions) disappear, people lose interest in the community. People need solidarity that can be grasped with the senses, but this is only created if they feel a need for society and community. Only if young people discover, for example, that those who damage the community and society damage their own individuality, will they develop a sense of community, a social sense.

I should therefore like to argue that many institutions are too small, such as the family or relations with partners, and many are too large and too remote. The balance between proximity and remoteness is disturbed. For many people in Europe, the bodies that have a say in their fate are too far away, too abstract. They therefore do not know whether their vote in an election and their interests have been taken into account and have influenced the decisions of those bodies.

This trend of creeping depoliticisation harbours two dangers. In the national parliaments, increasing attention is called to the fact that the real decisions are taken in the European context. On the other hand, Europe has not yet acquired any true political identity that provides a sense of direction. Here, too, I must reiterate my basic precept: that democracy starts where people live, work and acquire their initial experiences in social intercourse. The fostering and development of this primary socialisation should be the basis for the use of technical media for the purpose of shaping life. Where the media take on the suggestive power of a second reality which overlays or suppresses initial experience of reality, a substitute world of illusions and self-deception is the result. Mere access to the Internet or other information networks does not make people enlightened and unprejudiced world citizens; nor does such access to a network directly increase political judgement; more information is made available, but the real problem of learning and education today is no longer the amount of information but the ability to handle information. Adult education in Europe has a key role and task in this regard.

In order to create forms of organisation and social contexts in which human proximity and critical distance, proximity and remoteness, balance each other out, the democratic civil society in Europe needs to strengthen and promote all those collective institutions that are not chiefly profit-oriented but give people actual access to larger units, and we need to concentrate our imagination on the organisation of such social institutions. This completely contradicts the current obsession with privatisation, which is the characteristic of present-day capitalism. The major companies are caught up in a fever of mergers and are breaking all the bonds that hold people's lives together, as Ralf Dahrendorf has rightly put it (Dahrendorf et al, 1995). If these forces of social cohesion are loosened or weakened, there are grave consequences for people's ability to communicate since they are only willing to entertain what is different and alien in the world if they have firm ground, experience of belonging, beneath their feet.

The commercial demand for people who are flexible, adaptable and market-oriented assumes an intact personal identity. But people can only be flexible if they have developed what amounts to a core identity. That in turn benefits not only the modern economy but also a democratically structured society, which requires people to be guided from within and to have critical judgement. Both of these characteristics can only come about in people's development if they are standing on firm ground and are attached to a perceptible reality.

Democracy is thus that form of social existence which cannot come about by itself but must be learnt. Lifelong learning, adult education which goes beyond narrow vocational training, is therefore a requirement for the existence of a democratic social order. Furthermore, we cannot sub-divide this notion of democracy by divorcing participation in society and the community on the level of parliamentary elections, in which free citizens rule, from the recreation of old hierarchical, authoritarian relationships in industrial enterprises, service industries, schools and universities, disenfranchising those who depend on them. In the long term, that will not work, and I am convinced that it is in fact economically counter-productive.

Contributions to the European Project

Let me divide up these critical issues roughly as follows. There is no continent on earth which can invest so many and such varied resources in a productive unification process as Europe. We can even gain something positive from the development in isolation of the nation-states in the nineteenth century, even though the eighteenth century had gone much further with the Europeanisation of our cultural area. Europe must not be a construct without a memory. Too many productive approaches to living would be lost if we failed to direct our attention to preserving our collective memory and to recognising our unique socio-cultural variety of lifestyles, which must not be reduced to a common level by money and the production of goods. Although it may sound paradoxical, the long-standing plethora of languages is an essential element of creating a European identity. The time may perhaps not be far off when children grow up in every family with a second language, and I do not mean always the same one, but Italian with German, Finnish with French, or English with Danish.

I have called Europe a working project. All countries have something of an unquestionably European nature to contribute to this project. It might, for example, be the tradition of trade union organisation, which goes back more than a hundred years, with its specific workers' culture in the individual countries. This is not the same in Italy, Germany and Finland, but it is consistently governed by the thought that there are masses of people in a capitalist society (and by no means only there) who cannot defend their rightful interests and needs individually but require collective support and solidarity. The European trade unions may be in crisis in the present state of upheaval, but there can be no doubt that there are millions of people who are poor, exploited and sick. The trade unions should, if I may be permitted a word of advice, pay far more regard to their mandate towards society as a whole and conceive of their interests as clearly concerning people's lives, which are not defined solely in terms of the workplace (cf. Negt, 1989). The struggle to democratise relations in enterprises is an essential step towards the realisation by those who work in them that they can influence what happens in society.

Europe has the traditions of the social state to contribute, the Nordic countries and Germany more strongly than the southern countries. A Europe which became completely Americanised in this regard would destroy the foundations of its existence, though I do not want this to be understood as anti-Americanism. We must certainly restructure the existing social systems. But even then something amounting to a European idea remains. It is the cultural human capital which the individual countries contribute to European life, and I am not only thinking of museums and music, which have always had an element of internationalism: what Jean Sibelius learnt from the Art of the Fugue came up against national barriers and narrow-mindedness. I mean the everyday cultures, which deserve to be preserved and must definitely not fix their sights solely on the global society.

Even at the present time, this variety in unity provides its own extremely important dialectic of relations between the particular and the general. Political and sociological ingenuity creates many different cultural peculiarities within this unity.

A wide range of social experiments are being conducted to solve the pressing problem of unemployment in the individual countries of Europe; they are many and varied, and I will only mention a few here. Attempts are being made through self-help, with state support channelled through employment offices, not to trust blindly to market forces, but to develop collective alternatives that are worthy of human beings. In Italy, social cooperatives are being set up with tax reductions and local authority grants in the early years, and with the support of the trade unions. Such cooperatives are becoming more numerous. Other initiatives are being launched by major companies – for example, by the steel giant Voest-Alpine in Austria. On the day when notice is given, staff who are dismissed become members of a foundation, and they take part in a six-week orientation course, the costs of the foundation being borne by the company, and by the staff through salaries withheld. Foundations covering particular occupations or regions and involving local authorities (communes) are common in Austria. In the Scandinavian countries, there is more state support, and in France, there are occupational associations, which must be part-funded by companies. The trade unions are actively involved in all these cases, and in the so-called social enterprises in Germany. Here, too, we are therefore undergoing a European learning process, and without such mutual learning and experimentation, Europe will remain an empty economic shell.

If Europe is to grow together, leisure-time tourist visits will not be enough to ensure that people learn from an exchange of ideas. It will be necessary to carry out adult education programmes in all European countries as part of the type of projects that I have mentioned as examples. Mere vocational training may increase the chances of finding a job in the market place, but it does not directly help to redirect this world of radical change towards education, towards the capacity to make critical judgements and the ability to handle information – that will require a special effort, didactic skill and, of course, money.

The self-awareness that I am German and European, Finnish and European, and so on, is necessary if European cohesion is to be sustainable. I am not talking about the kind of European patriotism which makes other peoples into enemies and removes recognition from the strangers in our countries. But education and learning always have a double purpose today: both conveying factual knowledge *and* providing guidance. People have a great interest in both. They can indeed draw their factual knowledge nowadays from technical channels such as computer programs and the Internet, but this accumulated wisdom seldom makes them into active citizens who are as concerned for the common weal as for the protection of their own interests. They might still make sacrifices for the old nation-state, but why should they do so for Europe, for other countries? What do Europeans need, then, in order to find their way successfully in this world, what guidance do they need, and what knowledge of vocational skills?

New Key Skills

To conclude this article, I will try to outline some new key skills that are crucial to the citizens of Europe. I do this on the background of 30 years of involvement in workers' education, among trade unions and in general adult education. These key skills can also be regarded as learning objectives for adult education. There is a certain universalism about this approach: I cannot imagine any civil society in which people are not equipped with such guiding knowledge or, to put it more exactly, those skills which link individual interests with a perception of the community, and the whole of society. Lengthy consideration and didactic trials have led to the identification of seven such skills which can be learnt by way of exemplary learning. By 'exemplary' I mean learning processes that are determined by people's own interests and horizon of perception, so that general relationships are made comprehensible (cf. Negt, 1971).

1. Creation of Context

The oppressive alternative reality of the world of the media sets out to fragment information. Weighing, selecting and processing information is a necessary act of personality development. This is only conceivable as the object of conscious learning. If people do not combine information, they can have no concept of the world, are liable to be deceived and can in certain circumstances be politically manipulated (the externally controlled character type, to use David Riesman's term (Riesman, 2001)).

2. Identity Skill

In our world of accelerating change, where a high degree of mobility is demanded of people, feelings of self-worth must be strengthened so that people have a secure sense of orientation. This calls for a large amount of knowledge. People need some form of 'identity training' to avoid succumbing to depression, illness and psychological disturbances when they are uprooted, lose their jobs and become unemployed, or suffer family break-up. Identity is not simply given but must be acquired, must be learnt, and changes as society develops. The pace at which social values are lost also has consequences for the loss of individual values of identity.

3. Ecological Skill

This is for me the caring, careful handling of nature, of things and of other people: for our quality of life we rely on the foundation of our existence remaining undamaged. Ecology in this sense has a far wider meaning than environmental issues, although it is central to these. Ecological thinking, ecological awareness, is a vital condition of the modern world, and on it depends the survival of the human species. Focusing on ecological learning is not a luxury which can be dispensed with as and when required.

4. Economic Skill

By this I mean that we need to grasp that economic activity is a social project devised by people and therefore governed by power and the vested interests of those with power. Restoring a human purpose to the economy is a matter of learning, by children of course, but also by adults, who must come to understand that economic laws are not the laws of nature.

5. Technological Skill

Here, too, our attitude is ambivalent. There are many people who say that technological development is fated, and that we can do nothing about it. Governments and bureaucracies often see it in this way, and this is reflected in people's everyday lives; but that is mistaken. If we think in terms of Europe as a whole, it is very important to shed light on the cultural meaning of technology. It is through this process of enlightenment and education that people will learn to comprehend that microelectronic rationalisation both renders communication between people far easier and makes increasing numbers of real live workers superfluous. This ambivalence of technology should be addressed in the educational campaign which Europe needs, and which must be more than purely vocational.

6. Justice Skill

People have to learn to distinguish between equality and inequality, justice and injustice. We live in a society in which it looks as though there were equality of opportunity, as though we had realised the ideal of justice in the circumstances governing people's prospects in life. Market forces, with their semblance of equivalency, force their way into our brains and confirm such illusions of equality. But this is a gigantic deception; for instance, it is self-evident that we have in Europe a North-South divide, rich and poor countries. A sharpened awareness of invisible inequalities and hidden injustices has been one of the essential elements of political education and one of the basic tools of people active in public life since the times of the ancient *polis*, since Plato and Aristotle. One factor is the enduring asymmetry, the injustice in the relations between the genders; the fact that women are gaining increasing numbers of school and university qualifications in many European countries while their representation in senior positions remains very modest is one of the matters at issue, and it amounts to a Europe-wide scandal. This is an unjust relationship between the genders. Inequality and injustice cannot be overcome merely by acquiring the skill of being aware of them; but if we are talking about the civil society, then the virtue of justice is a main objective of education.

7. Historical Skill

This refers to the power of utopian ideals and people's ability to remember. If people have no past, they have no energy and no courage to face the future, and are fearful of experimenting. In Europe, however, we are increasingly called on to involve ourselves in social experiments, and this requires us to pay far more attention to European history than we have to date in our reflections on the present. Sometimes, blind obsession with the present prevents us from opening our eyes to the potential riches of a European civil society which may lie hidden in some European country. It is

also a fundamental task of adult education to make these visible and open them to discussion by the European public.

The Need for Adult Education

Adult education is an essential means of creating a European identity; and there is a vital need for strengthening adult education by focusing the arguments which I have presented here on a number of political demands. Lifelong learning is currently a magic formula that is used in almost as indiscriminate a fashion as the concepts of individualisation and globalisation. Lifelong learning also has similarities with other slogans that are used as a form of legitimation, being easily turned into something optional. But as I have emphasised, learning throughout life is no longer a luxury which can be dispensed with in a society that is governed by rapid loss of values and the dynamics of production; it is a vital need that touches every individual. Therefore two preconditions must be fulfilled in the long term.

First, the hierarchy of values in our advanced societies must be overturned, so that the production of goods, capital and the share market are no longer the 'hard items' occupying the top positions while education, health care and learning are far down the list. The 'soft' items of education, health and well-being, and people's lifestyles increasingly point the way to the future as the real investment opportunities for a society on which depends everything associated with democracy and with what we call a citizens' or a civil society.

Second, we must finally grasp that adult learning is no longer a matter of individual needs and individual decisions about how we spend our money. The education ministers of all member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have set lifelong learning for all as a guiding principle. If this is not to be reduced to a form of words, adult education must become a public affair, just as the struggle for general school education eventually led to the creation of public institutions.

Professional adult educators, educationists and critical contemporaries who decry the tragic state of the public school system may raise considerable objections to such an institutionalisation of adult education. I share these doubts in some respects; but the objections are only partly justified. When the attempt was made in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to institutionalise the acquisition of cultural skills through compulsory schools and compulsory teaching rather than leaving it to the wishes and material wealth of the parents, humanistic purposes doubtless played a part; but the essential thing was that an entire system of production and trade had made reading, writing and arithmetic a prerequisite for everyday dealings with engines and machinery and could not function without these cultural skills. And how do things stand today? People are tied to technological communication systems which are constantly changing, and are subjected to systems of control governing responsibility and ethical norms. These have a deep influence on our lives and make it necessary, in the interest of finding one's own identity, not only to take further vocational training or even to choose new occupations but also to acquire knowledge in order to find some direction in life. We are confronted by a historic pace of change so that we must subjectively react to what is done to us by outside forces, to what we are drawn into, rather than merely being carried along by circumstances.

We can no longer assume that what is learnt during childhood in schools will remain viable throughout life. This is no longer even the case in trade crafts, where traditional sets of skills and rules used to be handed down. My demand is therefore that compulsory institutions should be created for adults, paid for and maintained out of public funds, so that they are comparable in rank and status to the public school system. Why should it not be compulsory for an adult, who has a long life expectancy of 60, 70 or 80 years, to attend educational institutions for five or six years, and to gain certificates? This is not in fact as revolutionary as all that, since the supplementary training of managers, doctors, architects and teachers, which is currently largely funded privately or by companies, points directly to the social need for such institutionalised education. I regard the notion that informal learning might be obstructed or rejected because of such institutionalisation as a mistaken assessment of relations between institutionalised learning and so-called voluntary learning. On the contrary: the higher the place of learning in the hierarchy of public concerns, the more powerful will be the motivation to seek further education of one's own choice voluntarily.

I am aware, however, that the reassessment of adult education has only just begun. I believe it would be a decisive step towards the creation of a democratic civil order in Europe if cultural self-realisation were to become a European project for the various individual cultures, within a broad vision of Europe.

Notes

- [1] This article is based on a paper given at the conference 'Lifelong Learning, Liberal Adult Education and Civil Society' in September 1999 in Turku, Finland. With the permission of the author, Palle Rasmussen has added subtitles and references and made minor editorial changes.

References

- Augustine (1950) *The City of God*. New York: Modern Library.
- Bourdieu, P. (1998) *Le mythe de la mondialisation et l'Etat social europeen*. Paris: Contre-feux, Liber raisons D'Agir.
- Dahrendorf, R. et al (1995) *Report on Wealth Creation and Social Cohesion in a Free Society*. London: Commission on Wealth Creation & Social Cohesion.
- Durkheim, E. (1984) *The Division of Labour in Society*. London: Macmillan.
- Forrester, V. (1999) *The Economic Horror*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Freud, S. (2005) *Civilization and its Discontents*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Habermas, J. (2001) Why Europe Needs a Constitution, *New Left Review*, September–October.
- Hegel, G.W.F. ((1994) *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte, vol. 1, Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, ed. J. Hoffmeister. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag.
- Kant, I. (1996) *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kondratieff, N. (1984) *The Long Wave Cycle*. New York: Richardson & Snyder.
- Negt, O. (1971) *Soziologische Phantasie und Exemplarisches Lernen*, 6th edn. Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt.
- Negt, O. (1989) *Die Herausforderung der Gewerkschaften*. Frankfurt: Campus.
- Negt, O. (2001) *Arbeit und menschliche Würde*. Göttingen: Steidl.
- Riesman, D. (2001) *The Lonely Crowd*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sennett, R. (1998) *The Corrosion of Character*. New York: W.W. Norton.

OSKAR NEGT is former Professor of Sociology at the University of Hannover. He has researched and written on critical theory, modernity, work and unemployment, trade unionism, childhood and adult education. *Correspondence*: Professor Oskar Negt, Podbielskistrasse 31, D-30163, Hannover, Germany.