



Democracy and Bildung

– a Concept



BILDUNG

Summary

As a concept “Democracy and Bildung” is linked with the how and the what of educational and learning processes and encompasses all aspects of the development of individuals, the development of communities and the development of societies, through its ethical aspects and emotional and scientific dimensions. Using the Bildung approach within democratic education creates links between democratic institutions, understanding and using democratic rights and the ability of the individual/the society to intervene, resist and change. Bildung in democratic education can also protect the diversity of the European identity by including democratic processes at all levels of activation and influence.

Democracy education is based on the historical concept and understanding of democracy in its three different dimensions:



1. the development of democratic institutions,
2. the development of basic democratic and social rights and human rights, and
3. the development of the potential for democratic intervention and change.

We relate the above to the understanding that **adult education has historically been a vehicle for experimentation and implementing concepts of an egalitarian and liberating education.** Furthermore, adult education has been a place of inclusion, a place where findings are discussed and evaluated and open communities are fostered (cf. Freire 1972).

The discourse on adult education, its key concepts, tasks and functions are essentially shaped by supranational organisations. Concerning the relationship between adult learning and democracy or democratic developments, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the European Union and the OECD stand out in this context.

Bildung, for us, refers to the individual but also society; it is to be interpreted as a relationship to oneself but also to 'the world'. Living with global problems, refugee crises, economic crises, and ecological crises asks us to develop our moral sensibility and our empathic abilities to a global skill to be able to think and feel and decide from a global perspective. Based on our research, we have seen that **democratic education has the potential to be a means of power distribution between citizens and power structures due to ethics** (justice, equality, human rights), resulting in co-shaping the narrative as a continuation of the legacy of values.

Democracy and concepts of holistic Bildung are historically linked in their reference to multiple contexts of everyday life.

Democracy requires criticality and knowledge about institutional ways and the possibilities of participation. Education, to that extent, is needed as part of the path and practice of searching for solutions that are not a foregone conclusion and that are characterised by opposing opinions.

Good practice examples:

Improvement of democratic participation: Participatory budgets – Catalonia | The project allows for the direct participation of citizens in the preparation of public budgets, involving them in the reflection of needs, identification of demands and prioritization of budgets, as well as the monitoring of accountability by governmental choices. | More information: <http://acefir.cat>

Train the trainer databases and material banks: Epic Light – Finland | Epic Light publishes media content created by young adults facing different challenges in their lives. All the activities are done in peer groups. Epic Light aims to motivate and empower both the creators and the audience. | More information: <https://mieletontavaloa.fi/english/>





Adult learning and education provision and courses: Village University – Estonia | “Kodukant” encourages broad-based, legally constituted village organisations, which can stimulate and co-ordinate activities in their locality, mobilising local communities and encouraging them to become more organised. | More Information: <https://kodukant.ee/en/>

Adult learning and education provision and courses: Autonome Schule Zurich (ASZ) – Switzerland | The ASZ is a self-organised and independent school where all important decisions are made once a month in a plenary meeting. Whether volunteer teacher or participant, everyone is valued equally in decision-making. | More information: <https://www.bildung-fuer-alle.ch>

Recommendations:

The “macro-level” – Policy, Civil Society etc.

Understanding democratic rights and especially the ability to apply them and to intervene, resist and change means. This understanding must be embedded in an appropriate context, which leaves room for visions, but also a realistic assessment of power issues and inequalities.

→ Democracy has to be learnt. | Bildung is a right for all. | Transnational cooperation is essential for a unified Europe.

The “meso level” – Community

Relates to how democracy education fosters dealing and interacting with one's local environment. This could include projects and examples as providers of democracy education, supporters of engagement, moderators of networks, but also as service providers towards politics or civil society associations.

→ The power of the community is immeasurable. | Adult education must aid in defining our roles as citizens. | How democratic are the adult education organisations?

The micro-level – Courses

The content and methods taught and applied by the trainers and the needs of the learners through a participatory understanding that connects to the reality of the life of the participants, e.g. acceptance different individual interests, personal needs for democratic education, and the willingness of participants to get involved in political processes.

→ Democratic Education should consider individual interests and needs. | Focus on Democratic Education | Practice Democracy in the classroom



Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



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