

Learning for and in a Degrowing Society

Human beings learn lifelong. It is part of our biology that neuron connections grow and shrink every time according to sensational stimulation. Hereby, sensations, which are meaningful for the individual, are better and more intensely linked. Thus, the development of brain structures is connected to own experiences, feelings and, especially in the case of children, to physical movement. That means that children do not only learn at school, but as well in all their life contexts.¹

Part of human's biology equally is that Children have an urge to play and to explore their environments. Thus, in evolution biology it is concluded that play and exploration urge must be very important for the fitness of the being. Moreover, ethnologists found that children in hunter-gatherer societies mostly fill their days with play in groups of age-mixed children or mimicking adult's activities. Neither much formal education nor extended chores were observed. In societies which might have had a similar structure, mankind developed as a biological being.²

In contrary, in modern societies children have a passive role. Modern childhood mainly takes place indoors. It is seen to be steered by adults' inputs, whether pedagogically welcomed as in schools, other day care institutions or by parents, or whether criticised as influence of electronic media and an abundance of toys. Children's life takes place on isolated "islands", designed for them and mostly separated from adult's life. Children often cannot reach from one to another location by their own.³

What children in modern societies learn most is to act on these small islands which are not connected to one another, to fulfil pedagogical requirements of adults and to be a more or less passive consumer. Some aspects of modern childhood are reclaimed to have harmful influences, as e.g. lack of physical exercise and overweight or lack of concentration for learning. They are answered by the mind-set of the industrial society: new special professions for adults and new special rooms for children are created. "Learning" is delegated to schools, play and participation in social life has a lower status.

On the other hand the UN convention of the right of the child explains, that children have a right to play and to participate freely in cultural life (art. 31). In 2013 art. 31 was explained by a general comment. Concern of the situation of children's autonomy is expressed. More leisure time, more free space to play and more opportunities to take part in cultural life freely are demanded.⁴

Modern societies focused on economic growth are strongly specialised both in professional activities and for land use. This is counterproductive to children's urge to explore and play, as modern societies

1 Caspary, Ralf; Stern, Elsbeth (2006): Lernen und Gehirn. Der Weg zu einer neuen Pädagogik. 2. Aufl. Freiburg im Breisgau [u.a.]

2 Konner, Melvin (2010): The evolution of childhood. Relationships, emotion, mind. Cambridge, Mass.

3 Zeiher, Helga (1995): Die vielen Räume der Kinder. Zum Wandel räumlicher Lebensbedingungen seit 1945. In: Ulf Preuss-Lausitz (Hg.): Kriegskinder, Konsumkinder, Krisenkinder. Zur Sozialisationsgeschichte seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg

do not afford interesting and relatively safe places, where children may on one hand act creatively of their own and on the other hand perceive important processes of society and nature.

In a degrowing society children must have time and space to play and act in a lively and diverse neighbourhood. Society has to accept children with their special needs and give them the chance to participate. Spaces have to be multifunctional. Children need risky play but they must be able to manage it. Thus, motorised transport, anonymity and forbidden spaces must be minimised in neighbourhoods. Small businesses, crafts and gardens, where children observe and as well participate in production and reproduction, must be welcomed. Diverse interesting places in nature must be attainable for them. Thus, they experience that wellbeing is not first of all dependent from material consumption but from diverse and sustainable social relations and from own creative and realistic activities.

Children having the opportunity to act and learn in their environment would be strong and healthy enough for concentrated lessons and schools would not have the role to repair all negative impacts from society.

4 United Nations, Committee on the Rights of the Child: General comment No. 17 (2013) on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts (art. 31)