

“Well Educated”. Pedagogical Reflections on a sociological term

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Abstract: In this article is reflected the meaning of “well educated” with a pedagogical view. It is discussed on the basis of literature. “Well educated” as a social metaphor is less outcome of an educational process than more means of a social segmentation. On the other hand education can contribute to a more differentiated and inclusive meaning of the term.

Keywords: well educated; cultivated; culture; human identity

Nobody is just socialized, not even in less developed environments than – for example – the member states of the European Union. All people are educated in one way or the other. And a lot of research is done on this education in family, school, peer groups and daily life. We all know the problems of lack of education, leading perhaps to illiteracy or deviant life circles. But do we know and discuss about the positive extreme, the good education, which is producing “well educated” persons? In this article I follow the question: How far is “well educated” based on a certain approach in education?

The „well educated” man is an established metaphor. Someone is cultivated (which is another word for “well educated” or “sophisticated”) – is something mostly referred to one’s behavior, one’s action, one’s looks. In social context well educated colloquially designates a refined, neat way of life oriented toward the moral concepts of a certain social group or layer. As defined by the upper European social layers, a way of life described as „well educated“ has three principal directions; the first one is related to that what can be seen, more or less the personal design such as a well groomed appearance, proper esthetic clothes and an aesthetically appealing environment. The second one is related to the behavior of the people, such as tactful and empathic reactions, superior manners and a high level in conversation (use of language, statements etc.). The third one is something inside the persons, a certain level of general knowledge, a set of values and moral positions. Such a positively perceived cultivated behavior is elegance. It doesn’t appear artificial or unnatural and is manifested with a convincing efficiency and apparent easiness. Usually the adjective „cultivated“ is only used for adults, since children and teenagers are still going through a process of socialization, that should make them adapt to the dominant culture. The degree of exhibited cultivation always (often subliminally) also acts as a status symbol.

However, the adjective “well educated” comprises an obvious fuzziness, so that from an objective point of view it is not clear what kind of “education” has to be deemed better than another. The fact that people are “well educated”

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only in certain subarea of their behavior also contributes to confusion. While some people's eating and drinking habits, the way they dress and their general way of expression in conversations and in written texts can be considered as well educated, the same people may disregard and ignore human dignity and the right to life of other humans. Conversely, an emissary of an aboriginal nation, who is faithful to his own principles and morally may seem more cultivated than a rich country citizen in the congruency between words and action, while his way of dressing, eating and other appearances completely diverge from each other. Therefore there is no objective definition for the concept „well educated“, it depends in general on the criteria. But wherefrom the criteria are coming? Basically there must be a relation to the respective culture, the respective society the person is living in.

This leads to the question: are people who live in a certain culture produced by themselves per se “cultivated” people? Or is “cultivated” in fact a complete synonym to “well educated”, meaning: educated by others?

We could extend the idea and approach the action of the culture creating man. For Aristotele the man is a zoon politicoon, a social and political being; Karl Marx considers him the mirroring of the totality of social relations, Ernst Cassirer understands him as a being endowed with the capacity to symbolize. Many concepts have been used to describe the characteristics of man in different epochs of humanity since the Homo species in order to distinguish him among hominids and to describe him. Nature, the natural surroundings and especially the gradual climatic changes have affected the transformations processes in the family of hominids; it is about their adaptation to the increasing powers to design nature. Evolution is a continuous process at different speeds and spatial differences. The history of the hominids has many periods of such accelerated alterations on different areas bringing about the development of the Homo Sapiens species. But this isn't a sequence with a single cause. It cannot be separated either from its cultural development or from the violence and forces of nature. The answer to the question at which point can we speak about man as such in the first place and how vast should be the idea of mankind depends upon what are the criteria we accept and what turning points we deem to be especially important.

„Homo sapiens“ is understood in the strict sense of the word within the concept of mankind. All of us, who in contemporary times belong to the forms our species, as well as all those who preceded the modern form of men are included in the species. The narrowest understanding of the concept of mankind is limited to the contemporary form of human life, as it has occurred in the world for about the last forty thousand years or at most one to two hundred thousand years. And in order to clearly specify this: all these processes have been “cultivated” within their own context and at their time, and where to be produced outside the circuit of nature through the cultural competence and distance from nature. Men of different races and nations, who live on different continents and under different climatic conditions, exhibit common biological features originating from a common ancestry and from the affiliation to the same species. These biological indicators are genetically established, but they have also been modified through the influences of the living environment, thus in both cases conditioned through the elements of nature. Nature created man and still creates him – thus the products of men comprised by the term „culture“ originate from nature, even if these affect nature in a formative and altering way.

In contrast to the procreative nature, the essential characteristic of men is the possession of culture. The possession of culture mainly means the capacity of the individual to perceive oneself as a counterpart to nature and nature as an object of cultivation. The dominance over nature creates „problems, that must be solved”, and these „occur because man possesses a body subjected to diverse biological necessities and because he lives within an environment, that on one side is his best friend and provides man with the raw materials necessary for human work, and still, on the other side, it represents a dangerous adversary, hiding inside itself many adverse forces. In this somehow stochastic and surely overmodest affirmation [...] there the idea contained that the theory of culture has to move on a fundament of biological data. Man belongs to animals. He relies on many elementary conditions enabling him to remain alive“ (Malinowski 1944, p. 29). This requires individual as well as collective production. The individual human being is almost helpless towards nature, he or she needs community or cultural products created together with other humans, products that can serve as tools in the confrontation with nature. Therefore community is the second stage of the relation between man and nature – the common collective counterpart to nature.

In order to achieve this, there are norms and behavior rules in each human community, there are certain principles and values to be observed. But biological and natural characteristics dictate the cultural particularities. All objects used by man must be adjusted to the characteristics of man's body, man's power and to its manual abilities. The human physiology acts upon similarity in the shape of material culture. Eating is a physiological necessity in order to build a capable and healthy body. The basic needs of hunger and thirst is inseparably linked to human health. Sleep is also inseparable from the human existence. Sleep serves to the reproduction and cleansing of the human psyche – that has the same value as the Physis, and is similarly sensitive and needy as the Physis. Nature with its change from light to darkness has dictated the everyday life of man, its forces a natural biorhythm with production at day and reproduction at night. The concept of the „biological standard of life“ points to the factors that are important when comparing groups of populations, such as: genetically conditioned differences of body sizes, cultural eating habits and the body size of the precedent generation.

In the twentieth century the interest for the cultural aspects of social life has increased. All sociological analyses began with the consideration of the cultural dimension. This way new partial special subjects of study appeared, such as the sociology of culture, the sociology of religion, the sociology of science, sociology of arts, sociology of education, law sociology, the sociology of mass media, visual sociology and many others. The cultural phenomena, for instance, art and traditions, lifestyle, fashion, trust, stereotypes, human value judgments, tastes and educational aspirations became objects of investigation for leading sociologists.

In sociology the concept of culture refers to acquired or learned social aspects of human functioning and not to aspects inherited by man. Culture must be learned in this sense. Culture designates those elements in the life of community that are common elements for all members of society and facilitate collaboration and communication. Culture includes immaterial aspects, as well as cultural contents (such as myths, convictions, ideas, values and standards), as well as material aspects representing these cultural contents, for instance objects, furniture or bridges, tools, institutions or transformed natural sites (as fields and regulated rivers).

Material civilization or even technical civilization are sometimes designated as material culture (vgl. Braudel 1985), though the concept of „civilization” possesses an obviously larger connotation, comprising material and immaterial culture. Eventually behind each material object there is human evolution, a technical thought, the idea of a designer, the practicality of an object, and eventually the social standards from which the rules for its utilization arise. The bicycle appeared as object of material culture thank to the invention of the wheel, but it postulated material and cultural stage of development of the society. One also has to learn how to ride a bicycle, as it is absolutely necessary to recognize and to observe the rules of road traffic; the cultural material production and the regulation of the cultural community go hand in hand.

„The technical civilization became a determination evolution factor of the new history. [...] The progress follows the principles of the evolutionary process: trial and error, variation and adjustment. Scientific production as element of the evolution has become of vital importance in the technical civilization. Part of the core of the new developmental stage is the informational technology for better organization of the general knowledge“ (Plischka 2005, S. 55). The civilization based on techniques (as a concept for a culturally more developed society – „civis“ already means „citizen“ in a culturally regulated environment) has always won its triumph against „barbarians“, the men and people without culture, even if it has been temporarily conquered. If the barbarians were victorious, they were “assimilated” to the higher culture (or at present: acculturated into it) and within foreseeable periods of time, they became undistinguishable from the conquered higher culture – this applies with regard to the North-European barbarians in the territories of the Roman empire, as well as for nomad people in China (Braudel 1985, P. 60 ff.).

Almost everything characteristic for mankind lies hidden inside the notion of culture. Man is a biological being, tied to the biological inheritance and meanwhile man „inherits“ culture, the capacity to live in a culture. The process of adopting this heritage is the “socialization” or, more specific, the „enculturation“. It lies within the space in between socialization and education. The percentage of socialization and education is higher than natural influences. An obvious indicator is the fact that cultural evolution takes place much faster than the biological evolution. The human of the now barely distinguishes himself from his ancestors who lived 30 thousand years ago (the increase of the body size or the earlier onset of puberty belong to the few occurred changes), though his cultural world doesn't display any resemblance to the former reality. But we don't even have to look so far back. Who could have imagined the existence of virtual worlds a few hundred years ago! A progressive mechanization of life conditions is reached in every sector of life. „Models of self-organization and chaos research are aiming to explain, for example, sociological and economical processes, the research of the brain claim to trace back thinking and sensing structures to neurophysiologic processes, the research in artificial intelligence intend obtain results equivalent results to mental operations with the aid of computers and the biological behavior research believes it establishes evolutionary mechanisms as the foundations of human behavior “ (Schiemann 2011, p. 70 f.). The concept of nature becomes a universal catch phrase even in different social discourses. It has to be protected, improved, and saved from the influences of culture that are not only destroying it, but also transforming it.

The concept of cultural naturalization opposed standing in opposition to naturalism, respectively the culturalization of nature, conceives it as part of culture. Culture is granted the power to push nature aside or even to entirely replace it and to extend man's power to control. Numerous publication titles, such as „The death of Nature“ by C. Merchant or „The End of Nature“ by McKibben and G. Ropohl, are linked to the opinion of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, that „Man has left [...] Nature and [...] he can never return to it“ (ib., p. 71).

History knows many examples of ethnic groups, who didn't want to accept the fact that all communities are entitled to define themselves as "humans". Anthropocentric religions and Philosophies have strengthened the conviction about the uniqueness and non-interchangeability of man versus the world of animals. Though the current science disproves this thesis. Man is the biological species, who generated culture in the sense of interweaving biological features with contexts of social life. Man is less a "zoon politicon" but rather more a "zoon culturalis", who distinguishes himself through language and through the specific human way of communication.

No society exists without culture just like culture is unconceivable without society. Precisely in the recent present, in the world of advanced technical civilization, it is hard to imagine a human estranged from society, independent from other living human beings, who doesn't benefit from the cultural development of the entire humankind. Eventually man evolves through the participation to social life. The differentiation of man is of great importance for the usage of cultural concepts for the qualification of „cultivated man“. Herder has already named in his "Ideas about the Philosophy of the History of Mankind" (published between 1784-1791) three features of culture in collective sense, in the sense of community:

1. *Social Homogenization: culture shapes the life of an entire homogenous nation homogenous without further differentiation.*

2. *Ethnic foundations: cultures are bound to nations, they are "the blossom" (Herder) of a nation's existence.*

3. *Intercultural delimitation: Nations delimitate from each other on grounds of cultures. Herder describes cultures as balls bumping into each according to their inner Logics (s. Welsch 1992, p. 6).*

In the opinion of Herder, who has given important impulses for the perception and definition of culture, preponderantly there were national states cultures based on language, regional nation identity, which was an important thought in his time that attended and facilitated the becoming of national states. According to this definition, there was only one culture within these states. It has been understood by Herder as founding the identity of all the members of a society in delimitation to all other societies. The differentiations within this one culture have not been picked out as a central theme, these have been less important for the debates regarding the national states.

The differentiation of a national culture from an overall social culture manifests on all the levels and for the elements belonging to the essential defining characteristics of culture. We can identify five crucial elements determining the culture of man. The first one is the language – not necessarily as a foreign language; each language is diversified in itself related to regional (dialect), age (youth language), professions (medicin) and above all "milieus", the social home of the people. The second one consists out of elements of the everyday life, such as concrete interests, leisure activities, honorary contributions and others. The third one is the habitus, the personal habitus, more

or less the background of the person, consisting out of knowledge, relationships, values and beliefs and visions. The fourth one are the references, the individual and collective references such as religion, history and family origin. And the fifth one, finally, is what is at a first glance understood as “identity”, based on profession, sex, education, age and environment.

These features can lead to subgroups of the cultural community, to the “milieus” (French origin, means “my place”). By these we understand cultural common ground of a group, that can be thus differentiated as part of society (s. Böhme 2005, p. 619). Earlier these culturally definable partial groups of the nation were linked within a cultural community, not necessarily integrated, but dependent on one another. Today, in the course of globalization, the references of cultural subgroups of a community to corresponding groups of another community are constantly increasing, the macro-identity of a cultural community begins to dissolve into comprehensive micro-identities.

This applies especially for groups who don't belong to the „official“ culture of the community, who exist in a certain degree besides or under this official culture – in most of the cases in a conscious and volitional manner. These are named “subcultures “, and therefore they definitely resonate with the term „subversive“. Such „subcultures“ often arise from youth movements and are expressed through language, music, clothing and communicational behavior. In the course of international mobility and through the present virtual communication possibilities, these form a multiple comprehensive network. Anyway, one cannot say that the unity of national culture (of the national, social culture) has dissolved, die Differentiation existed even earlier. But the diversity has become more obvious and more effective.

To summarize: Men are nature-bound beings and their culture is unimaginable without nature. As collective and as community, men dominate nature through culture, cultural material production as well as virtual culture. Eventually this implies a triangular relationship, in which, as community, man has stepped out from his relation between culture and nature and „communicates“ with both of them. In this respect the dialectics of culture retroacts on the community of men and „cultivates“ it. Thus, in a more developed sense, „civilisation“ arises as the collection of cultural products and rules on a higher „level“. „Firstly, it is clear that each culture accepts the existence of a certain minimum level for the satisfaction of the organic basic needs of a man or of his kind. These human needs [...] have to be satisfied. The satisfaction of needs is ensured through the creation of a new secondary, artificial environment. This environment, that is constantly reproduced and maintained, actually means the same thing as culture Cultural life standard means that it comes to the occurrence of new necessities and that the human behavior is designated by new criteria. Cultural tradition is transmitted from a generation to another. An educational system must inevitably exist in each culture. Order and law must be maintained, since common action represents the essence of all activities within culture. In each society there must be mechanisms, that sanction morals, ethics and law“ (Malinowski 1944, S. 29).

The metaphor of the „well educated“ man is however narrower and is to be understood as referring to the individual. Usually it designates a man with good behavior and high education, who also possesses eating manners, who is able to reflect on abstract phase at Picasso and on the causes of the Syrian war. Who also knows the basic principles of al that is natural (Fischer 2001). But even in moral and ethical matters the cultivated man proves to be a

humanist, who knows and observes human rights. To be strictly accurate, he embodies all that has socially evolved as special cultural achievement in forming the boundary between human and nature throughout the centuries. He also embodies the social progress that is more than the increasing amount of knowledge about realities and laws of nature. „Progress in the knowledge about nature without progress in the knowledge about society is fatal“ (Brecht, *The Life of Galilei* (1938)). Or, to put it in another words: „Education is what remains when we forget all learned knowledge“ (Edward Frederick Lindley Wood 1. Earl of Halifax).

With the increasing relevance of individual freedom and equality in western societies somehow disappeared the former importance of cultivation. Nowadays everybody can dress up and behave in an individual way without social conflicts, except maybe „VIPs“ (Very important people) being blamed in journals for their outfit. But this is true mainly for the western and european culture, much less f.e. in arabic countries. With this liberalisation the rules for style, elegance and good behavior became weaker. Since there is still asked a minimum of cultivation to be socially accepted, it became now in some regions and schools the task for schools to teach basics in manners, communication and design.

The paradox situation develops from the fact, that „cultivated“ and „well educated“ arose in former times from complete and perfect copying of socially accepted rules. People adapted them to be recognized. In times of individualisation there are personal ways for interpreting that what is meant by „well educated“ – and to communicate this interpretation. Actually the individual profiling of being „well educated“ or „cultivated“ is to follow social rules, which are dominating – just the contrary of individual freedom.

It is all about customs, an essential part of everyday culture. Customs are applied in every levels, environments and subcultures of a society and are known in subtler and more differentiate attunement within the respective a cultural group and in broad terms when viewed from a greater distance, in other environments and groups. A man who is not regionally but socially mobile also needs „acculturation“, he must learn the cultural customs and rules of the culture in which he arrives. And he must learn to handle them, to apply them or to consciously breach them. Pictures of „newly enriched people“ are widely known, men who have economically risen, who validate cultural rules, but don't (yet) observe them. There are countless examples and stories about the fact that adaptation to this other culture can be reached only during the second generation, which is to say that cultural behavior no longer stays out (as awkward, foreign and disturbing).

As the examples prove it, the cultural rules are changeable in the course of time. The „proper“ behavior is developing itself further. The influences from other cultural layers of the same society, as well as “foreign” influences are important here. The cuisine distinguishes many national and regional variants. The present European cuisine owes its diversity to the individual countries, that offer their own specialties, but also to the “exotic” impulses of the immigrant groups, who bring with them a richness of dishes and ingredients. This cuisine combines old traditional recipes with contemporary innovation and social food trends.

The cultural rules don't merely structure human behavior, but also bear testimony about rank struggles in social systems. „A struggle of the classes, but also of cultures expresses its self, as unobtrusive as it may be, through

luxury at present, as it did in the past (Braudel 1985, P. 192 f.). Basically, there is a simple rule: the finer it is, the higher the layer, the class, the social group. And the „more cultivated“ the people. Luxury costs money – the classification to „higher“ cultural goods, to luxury, is therefore always a question of money. But not only. In the cuisine it can be noticed that again and again, that simple food of poor people becomes a specialty for high cultural circles. On the other side, as Jean Claudian 1964 states (zit. n. Braudel 1985, p. 190): „If a food article, that has been desired for a long time, finally becomes affordable for the masses, than the consumption rises rapidly through a kind of ‘Explosion’ of the long repressed appetite. If it is however vulgarized (in the double sense of ‘made common’ and ‘popularized’) it loses soon its appeal... and a certain oversaturation occurs “.

Similar to other socially and culturally differentiated goods of consumption, for instance clothes, perfume, cosmetics, accessories. Furniture and design objects are also objects of social differentiation, not only of esthetical origins. Antiqs, as expensive commodities in the sixties and in the seventies, are now sold almost at loss – modern and fancy designs have priority at present. Similarly to the vacation destinations: the holidays on the Italian Adriatic coast and in the Spanish Marbella was the highest holiday feeling for Germans during the fifties of the former century (including music, clothes and the imports of Pizza- and Tapas-Restaurants), are at present mass tourism and is far behind the individual journeys in remote territories or highly expensive entertainment on cruise ships. Culture costs money, if it is meant to serve social differentiation. And often it has to.

Bourdieu has accurately analyzed in his influential work „The Fine Differences“(1982) what signification plays the senses– and also the „close-up sense“ (Seeing and hearing are te be understood as „remote senses“, tasting, smelling and feeling as „close-up senses“) – for the appreciation of social realities and processes, and what role plays the disqualification of certain delights in social power structure. It is the small things of everyday life – sensorial experienced – characterize social features and give them power. In any case: the initial importance of cultivation has disappeared with the increasing individualization, freedom and equality in the Western society, linked with the globalization through media. Clothes and life style, as well as structuring one’s own life path are now, in liberal societies, mainly left at the choice of the adult individual. With the same movement a certain perception of style and elegance has also been diminished. In any case, a lower limit of such cultivation is being required in order to be acknowledged in social life. From this reason, in Germany, in certain federal lands behavior and manners are being taught in schools.

The more or less free decision to adopt a cultivated behavior often goes along with a subjective loss of personal freedom, since decision primary aligns to the desire of being liked by others and to belong to a group with the same patterns of behavior. It doesn’t set any standards of its own regarding the desired behavior, communication and life quality, but takes over these notions from other reference persons. Therefore it requires a certain amount of humbleness, self-abandonement, discipline and allegiance. Complete self-denial is an exaggerated approach to this.

The conscious and free choice of cultivated behavior oriented to the values of other reference persons is most of the times linked to the wish of further self-development. In extreme cases, this can even bring about complete transformations, if very intensely practiced and supported. Numerous myths, fairy tales and movies feed on this

development potential of man, while in the short and fragmentary story it is often omitted how much real work concentration, perseverance, effort and dedication lies behind such a learning process before an extraordinary and outstanding amount of cultivation to be called “well educated” has been reached in a certain field.

Essentially two kinds of references arise here: cultivation as independent variable of economical well being, in luxury and consumption, and cultivation as independent variable of belonging to a cultural group. This applies within each cultural community, without taking into consideration the interference with other cultural communities. During the possible global, medial networking come more and more together independently from location, nation and society, in the aspects of preferences, perceptions, taste judgments and social references. Large global networks can arise from small cultural groups, which may not always be beneficial (for instance in the criminal field of children pornography or other deformities).

Yet we turn back to the well educated man. He or she is cultivated only within “his” or “her” own culture. Three verifiable dimensions go against this: the social dimension (the cultural habitus as characteristic of social grouping and layering), the regional dimension (the cultural habitus as dominance in precise regions, district and regional areas) and the time dimension (the cultural habitus depending on historical circumstances). But there is also a fourth dimension, which is hard to encompass and even harder to describe: the biographical dimension. The difficulty lies in describing and defining these individualized cultural habitus beyond case studies. Feelings, self-perceptions, interests, and experiences – all these play a role into it. „Cultivated“ also means being at peace with oneself, to have a coherent personality, to develop a sense of awareness regarding one’s own actions and impact – in the common understanding. „Cultivation is thought activity, receptiveness for beauty and the feelings of humanity. Pieces of information have nothing to do within it. A merely well informed person is the most useless bore on God’s Earth. Our aim has to be make people to form people, who posses both cultivation and expertise in a certain direction“ (Whitehead 2012, S. 39). Therefore, cultivation is the result of an education at high level, it is the expression of social layering – and follows after the question if the members of a society are all in the same extent in possession of the commonly produced culture. Thus layering has to be understood not only as vertical layering – as higher and lower culture, but also as horizontal layering within the system next to other environments.

Here education can create a higher degree of flexibility and permeability, without rejecting “cultivation” as bourgeois in the sense of old communist ignorance. Education may not become or remain a variable of the cultural situation dependent on the parents’ home, as it has been periodically criticized in Germany. Targets and processes of the education system have to be accessible for people without any cultural „background“, and they have to provide two things: to take into account the special conditions of the students and in the same time to qualify them to enculturate themselves to a higher degree. As a result it means: that cultural education must have a higher position value within the educational system of most countries than has been the case so far.

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