In Defense of Schooling: readings of the crisis of schooling in late socialist sociology of education in Romania

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Abstract

The paper explores the question of how the crisis of schooling as theorized by P.H. Coombs and more radically Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich, was read by sociologists of education and futurologists in late socialist Romania by placing these in the context of debates around schooling that cut across the Iron Curtain. By inserting the debates surrounding the crisis of schooling in state socialist Romania, a country with targeted educational innovation policies directed at engaging with and overcoming the crisis of schooling, the present paper sheds light on a less known side of understanding the crisis of schooling, namely by taking a perspective from within state socialism. The crisis of schooling emerged around 1968 as youth movements were changing the face of education around the world and predicated initially a disconnect between the means of preparing youth for the future and the aspirations of people around the world, as well as the increased knowledge demands of developing socio-economic contexts. However, around this time a second strand of critical intellectual production seeking to radically break with schooling emerged: a tradition that became famous under the headline of Ivan Illich's concept of 'deschooling' but was also an important driving force in Paulo Freire's critique of 'banking education'. In line with Marxist criticism of deschooling from both capitalist and socialist countries, sociologists of education in Romania vehemently defended schooling on the grounds that its inadequacies were perfectible and its social function primordial. However, they also saw in schooling the promise to transform relationships between knowledge production (in terms of research), production processes and education through integrating these three dimensions in schools. As such the article brings context to how the world crisis of education was engaged transformatively during late socialism and thus helps rebalance epistemologically the legacy of unilateral accounts of the crisis of schooling brought about by the end of the Cold War. Finally, the paper shows how the 'first global crisis of education' was turned into a 'tame' policy issue and how this laid the groundwork for the post-Cold-War tradition of educational governing through crises.

Keywords: deschooling, dialogic pedagogy, state socialism, right to education

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1. Introduction

The right to education is often associated with the right and obligation of children up to a certain age and grade level to attend school. Despite different national political systems, the experience of schooling is relatively homogenous across contexts for similar groups, while the outcomes of schooling are very different for people who belong to different marginalized groups or class positions. While attending school is normalized today as a practice, the early 1970s saw the emergence of a veritable crisis of schooling that was addressed differently in socialist and capitalist countries. In this paper, I engage with how schooling was first problematized opening up the possibility to critically reflect on inequalities in terms of socio-material and discursive inequalities in the process of knowledge production and circulation in schools. However, this 'wicked issue' soon became 'tamed' into an actionable improvable situation thus laying the groundwork for future ready-made educational policy solutions (on the distinction between 'wicked' and 'tamed' issues in educational governance, see Landri 2025), thus laying the groundwork for a depoliticization and normalization of the question of mass schooling and a rendering invisible of inequalities fundamentally underlying the process of schooling that had without being 'solved', been brought to light through the debate surrounding the crisis of schooling. Echoes of this debate still strongly resonate within current discussions surrounding credentialism, inequality, and the limits of schooling as a response to broader social crises.

In concrete terms, I will explore how the question of the existence of a crisis of schooling was discussed in one state socialist Eastern European country, namely Romania from the early 1970s to the late 1980s. In this, I will outline the specific conditions of the postwar crisis of schooling as identified by P.H. Coombs in the 'World Crisis of Education' (1968), Ivan Illich in 'Deschooling Society' (Illich, 1970) and Paulo Freire's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (Freire, [1968] 2005) and how they were taken up by international debates across the Iron Curtain. In a next step, I trace how these debates entered the sociology of education and futurology in Romania both directly through fragments being translated as part of an anthology of the sociology of education edited by Fred Mahler (1977), as well as indirectly through being referenced in key works of educational futurology and sociology of education as well as social pedagogy. By building on these, I outline the answers from within the Romanian system by building on the works of Emil Păun (1982; 1985), Mircea Herivan (1976) and Fred Mahler (1977; 1981; 1983) to questions that were engaged with by critical educational theorists such as Herbert Gintis (1973), Maxine Greene (1973) and Arthur V. Petrovsky (1976).

I show how a fundamental critique of schooling routed mostly in Latin American experiences was articulated by Freire and Illich in a context marked by the growing

recognition of a world educational crisis as theorized by Coombs and how this travelled into sociology of education debates in Romania only to be rejected. Whereas Freire focused on pedagogical aspects, Illich focused on a fundamental critique of the alienating powers of schooling and how schooling connected with and enabled the reproduction of consumerist societies in both socialist and capitalist countries. When being taken up in the Romanian context, this fundamental critique of schooling as both practice (Freire) and system (Illich) is seen as reproductive of inequalities in a problematic way that can only be countered by a socialist state enabling equal access to education and to a lesser extent equalized social status beyond school, as well as work into schools to transform how knowledge is taken up and practiced and how schools are connected to other social institutions. As such the fundamentality of the critique is displaced and a functionalist approach to schooling and its tacit reproduction and expansion is perpetuated, while school is partly re-imagined as an institution that can both (albeit to a recognized limited extent) transform social inequalities and socially homogenize the population while also to a lesser extent cultivating the transformative potential of youth. Schooling is thus rather uncritically defended as the main route to realizing the right to education within state socialism and problematic knowledge practices and status inequality are presented as unavoidable and even disconnected side-effects of an otherwise meaningful process and system of schooling.

2. Methodology

The proposed paper is built on a broader project that set out to map Romanian and transnational educational debates in late socialist sociology of education and educational futurology. The project started with library and digital archival research (mostly) in Romanian and English, and to a lesser extent German and French language sources. First the libraries of major universities and academic institutions in Romania were searched (University of Bucharest Library, Babeş Bolyai University Cluj, West University of Timişoara, Library Romanian Academy of Sciences Bucharest etc). Unavailable editions were also searched through websites of antiquarian bookstores and then purchased. At the same time, an initial archival research was conducted in the digitized archives available through the virtual sociological library (https://bibliotecadesociologie.ro), a digitization project that affords access to contemporary as well as historic sociological literature in Romania, as well as through the Arcanum newspaper archive (https://adt.arcanum.com/ro/discover/) and the UNESCO Unesdoc digital library (https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000075799). Initial research uncovered several relevant authors (Pavel Apostol, Mircea Herivan, Mircea Maliţa, Fred Mahler, Emil Păun, Lazăr Vlăsceanu, George Văideanu, Ursula Şchiopu etc) that were then followed through their research careers and publications from that time, as well as several edited volumes and relevant journals. In a next step, the debates were mapped out in relation to the conceptualization of educational futures, educational policies and innovation, the

crisis of education, the purpose of education, the construction of youth and the political, labor related, but also everyday life oriented importance of education and the relationship between education and techno-social innovations (mass media, television, film, cybernetics, school laboratories and innovations). The footnotes and bibliographies of these works were studied to reconstruct the debates, and these were followed up enlarging the basis for analysis and extending the initial analysis transnationally to follow the original texts of the debates referenced in these works. Although this approach does not aim to be exhaustive, given the timeframe (late socialist Romania), it allows for an authentic engagement with what bibliographic references were discussed and debated and which were ignored, allowing me to formulate comprehensive arguments from an intellectual historical and genealogical point of view. Keeping this in mind, the present paper is an exploration of the theme of the crisis of education in late state socialist Romania by following the question: *How was the global crisis of schooling debate of the 1970s, particularly the critiques of schooling articulated by Freire and Illich, received, translated, and reconfigured within Romanian state socialist sociology of education? And secondarily, What does this reveal about the ideological limits of critique and the functionalist defense of schooling under state socialism?*

3. UNESCO and the world educational crisis in the 1960s and '70s

In June 1968, Philipp H. Coombs (1968: v-vi) the director of the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning by building on the work of the 'International Conference on the World Crisis in Education' described the conjuncture in the following terms:

> *Our use of the word 'crisis' to describe education's state of affairs may also evoke initial dissent, even by some who accept the general thrust of the analysis presented here. This was the case with European educational leaders who reviewed an earlier draft of this book in late 1967. They readily agreed that other nations, especially the developing ones, no doubt faced a crisis, but not their nation—it simply faced educational 'problems.' The violent events since then in leading universities of Czechvoslovakia, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, the United States, and Yugoslavia have put the matter abruptly into sharper focus. Having examined the facts of the situation at large, we are more inclined than ever to call it by its right name—and 'crisis' seems entirely fitting.*

Coombs (1968) called for the need to open up educational debate beyond the tight confines of 'pedagogy' into fields such as engineering or sociology and described the student protests on both sides of the Iron Curtain, as well as the non-aligned movement as ('violent') events that bore witness to the resurgence of a world crisis of education that needed to be addressed by means of educational 'planning' that should operate on a systemic level. From todays' perspective, it is obvious that Coombs (1968) was applying a Western (and I can add Global North) perspective on educational planning that still survives in much of todays' educational thinking through the idea of competitiveness

between countries and the need to avoid 'lagging behind' and conversely the need to 'catch up', which in turn legitimized both a global educational research agenda, as well as a governance agenda lead by the OECD, UNESCO and the World Bank (Hemetsberger 2025: 48). However, despite its later influence, what did Coombs mean by the world-wide educational crisis he sought to describe?

Coombs (1968: 4) saw the world crisis of education emerging at the intersection of four processes that were in his view and even if not equally present in all societies in the 1960s, namely:

1. A sharp increase in popular *aspirations for education*

2. The constraining of educational systems by an *acute scarcity of resources*

3. The *inherent inertia of educational systems* that meant that educational systems would adapt with great difficulty to transformations and challenges outside of its system

4. The *inertia of societies* that blocked 'the use' societies could make of trained individuals

For Coombs (1968), these processes meant that the divide between education and society was ever-growing and that it needed to be addressed on both sides through better planning. Written in the heyday of educational planning, this report embodied the 'educationalization' of society, whose promises of a better, more equal future, we now know, have never been attained (Elfert & Ydesen, 2023:3). This went hand in hand with UNESCO's quest for finding a way forward teleologically towards a world culture and shared consciousness under the guise of 'scientific humanism', as promoted by its first director, Julian Huxley (Robertson, 2023). It is important to note that this vision had also been imbued with racist undertones in the form of civilizing imperialist discourses that encouraged an English/British 'civilising mission' (Sluga, 2010). Coombs' (1968) report also embodies a moment in which the new global order of (an almost fully) schooled society emerged (Baker, 2014) that had parted ways at least on the surface with this tradition, as well as a turning point in looking at educational developments as perpetual systemic crises that was carried through to and beyond the Covid-19 pandemic (Ahmed, 2023). The response offered by the UNESCO to the world educational crisis was the Faure report (Faure et al 1972). Published five years after Coombs' (1968) diagnosis, the report started with a teleological vision of learning as part of 'being' and in connection to the world of education of the present and the future. In short, by the 1970s this vision had kept its teleology in the form of promissory governance that drew its legitimacy from the promise of international organizations working for a better future for all humanity (Auld & Elfert, 2024). Moreover, the humanistic and democratic vision promoted by the Faure report, is still seen as a legitimate aspirational horizon for democratic education today, despite never having been realized (Biesta, 2022) and despite having been replaced and repositioned by subsequent moves in UNESCO promissory governance practices (Elfert 2015; 2017).

4. The radical critique of schooling: Freire's take on 'banking education' and Illich's call to 'deschool society'

When writing the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, [1968] 2005), Paulo Freire was in exile after a period in which he had been engaging in adult literacy campaigns in Brazil. His writings bring together exemplarily the Cold War politics that inscribed Latin American leftist understanding of literacy campaigns as both humanizing educational projects and processes of political mobilization (Kirkendall, 2010: 3). In this context, Freire launches his critique of 'banking education' as purely narrative education: the world is translated into sterile sound sequences rather than connected with the transformative capacity of individuals and collectivities. Moreover, banking education is an anti-dialogical process by which sterile knowledge is deposited by 'knowing' teachers into the minds of 'unknowing' students (Freire, [1968] 2005: Chapter 2). As an alternative to banking education, Freire proposes a dialogic liberatory practice in which the oppressed would be engaging in naming the world and through collective action-reflection also in transforming the world to fight injustice and liberate both themselves and the oppressors by overcoming oppression and creating a world in which 'it will be easier to love' (Freire, [1968] 2005: 40).

In Freire's thinking 'the oppressed', illiterate adult people who were economically exploited, had both a position of epistemological privilege and one of epistemological deficit. They were privileged through being the class that could liberate all humanity but were inscribed as having a deficit through the need to be rendered conscious of their historic task of liberation and their possibilities of action-reflection in the world through education (on deficit in Freire's thinking see also Azeri, 2020: 343). Freire's work on 'generative themes' (Freire, [1968] 2005: chapter 3) connected everyday experience with learning and transformative capacities of people that was translated into dialogic learning and transformation through Carolin Wang's and Mary Ann Burris' (1997) photovoice method, as well as Augusto Boal's 'Theatre of the Oppressed' (Boal, 2000). However, even in these subsequent iterations, the method continues to responsibilize 'the oppressed' for transforming their circumstances, while starting from the assumption that they need to first be transformed through educational dialogic action. Finally, from the perspective of this paper, it is important to underline the fact that Freire's critique of education in the Pedagogy of the Oppressed ([1968]2005) was a critique of practices rather than structures, education could become liberatory if it would start with the understanding that oppressed people brought into the educational process (and the educational process was understood mostly as basic literacy). At the time of writing, the Pedagogy of the Oppressed had not yet been fully translated into Romanian, a fragment from chapter 2 (on banking education) was included in the sociology of education anthology by Fred Mahler (1977; Freire 1977).

Roughly around the same time and emerging also from the Latin American context, a collaborator and friend of Paulo Freire, Ivan Illich criticized more radically not only the practices but also the social structures that he saw as rooted in the mass expansion of

schooling in *Descshooling Society* (Illich, [1970]2004). For Illich schooling, together with packaging were two main features of industrial society that needed to be overcome for the radically humanistic ideal of conviviality to take shape in everyday life (Illich, [1973] 2009: 3). For Illich, the critique of schooling is inseparable from the critique of industrial modernity, so he sees industrial tools and the general acceptance of schooling as necessity (and obligation) as leading ultimately to: "physical pollution, social polarization and psychological impotence" (Illich [1970] 2004: chapter 1: 1/15). For Illich, schooling is bound up inextricably with consumerism, it is its "reproductive organ". Schooling in a consumerist society is quintessential as it both provides the need for its own growth and reproduction, as well as initiates students into the hidden curriculum of growth-oriented consumer societies, characteristic that he considers state socialism and capitalist economies shared (Illich [1970] 2004: Chapter 6: 2/23):

> *Everywhere the hidden curriculum of schooling initiates the citizen to the myth that bureaucracies guided by scientific knowledge are efficient and benevolent. Everywhere this same curriculum instils in the pupil the myth that increased production will provide a better life. And everywhere it develops the habit of self-defeating consumption of services and alienating production, the tolerance for institutional dependence, and the recognition of institutional rankings. The hidden curriculum of school does all this in spite of contrary efforts undertaken by teachers and no matter what ideology prevails. In other words, schools are fundamentally alike in all countries, be they fascist, democratic or socialist, big or small, rich or poor. This identity of the school system forces us to recognize the profound world-wide identity of myth, mode of production, and method of social control, despite the great variety of mythologies in which the myth finds expression.*

For Illich (Illich [1970] 2004: 7/15): one of the main points of criticism of the schooled society was that learning is substituted by certification and instruction. Thus, a person becomes eligible for social roles based on number of years attending schooling, rather than his skills or learned abilities. For Illich, this ultimately results in inequalities that are reproduced through the curriculum. People who under-consume education (at that time wide segments of the world population) were made to feel guilty about this as they feel that they legitimately do not merit different social roles, regretting not having spent more time in schooling, schooling thus becomes a sanctioned and routinized social ritual (Illich [1970] 2004: Chapter 3: 8/13). His solution to early school leaving is indicative of his approach: if societies would stop making school mandatory, they would also stop punishing those who cannot access school. The alternative to schooling, so Illich would be that of 'learning webs' (Illich [1970] 2004: chapter 6) organized in an educational system that would be both non-compulsory and "truly universal". For Illich ([1970] 2004: chapter 6, 4/23), this could be realized by removing the myths surrounding education and especially the role of teachers and relying on: 'things, models, peers, and elders' as the four essential resources to make learning available to everyone. These should be organized in networks that would be readily available to the public and design to offer and spread equal opportunities to everyone. In terms of organization, the

de-bureaucratized system of learning webs would consist of (Illich ([1970] 2004: chapter 6, 5-6/23):

1. A Reference Service to Educational Objects (things)
2. Skill Exchanges (models)
3. Peer Matching (peers)
4. Reference Services to Educators at Large (elders)

This modality of thinking about learning without building a system that is ritualistic and hierarchical, as well as that radically opposes ideas of both explicit and hidden curriculum would allow, so Illich, people to learn openly from each other and to stop committing their time to education for vast periods of their lives. Learning would thus no longer be isolated from experience and could happen in places such as commuter trains or restaurants. Education could then be promoted alongside other services by department store managers, publishers and restaurant owners among others (Illich [1970] 2004: chapter 1: 13/15).

The Romanian translation of a short excerpt (Illich, 1977) included in Mahler's (1977) anthology, set out roughly Illich's critique of school as an institution and outlined the proposal for learning webs and was made via the 1971 French edition (Illich, 1971). The work was not fully translated into Romanian until 2018 (Illich, 2018), when it appeared in the collection Heteropedagogies (*Heteropedagogii)* at Idea publishing house. However, Illich's ideas were also available via the translation of Hubert Hannoun's book (1973) "*Ivan Illich ou l'École sans société",* which appeared in 1977 (Hannoun, 1977). Hannoun's book can be read today as one that defended schooling in light of the debate that ensued around the mid 1970s surrounding schooling (Zaldivar 2011: 621). The reception of Illich's arguments across the Iron Curtain in the 1970s was polarizing with reviewers engaging either explicitly against or in defence of schooling (Zaldivar 2011). Maybe the most illustrative examples of reviews can be found in the (later) edited volume by Alan Gartner, Colin Greer and Frank Riessman (1973). The collection (Gartner et al 1973) brought together essays in response to Ivan Illich's ideas. In the opening essay titled *"After Deschooling*, Illich (1973) goes a bit further from *Deschooling Society*, in making his critique of schooling more explicit. The other chapters are responses to his theses. Most of the chapters had been published as articles in the journal Social Policy with an essay by Herbert Gintis published in the Harvard Educational Review. In his opening essay, Illich (1973: 1-3) outlines clearly his understanding of the crisis of schooling as one based on the rejection of the legitimacy of compulsory education and educational certification as it leads both to turning learning into a commodity and limiting the autonomy of the learner in a context in which schools aim to reproduce the established order, irrespective of whether the order is called 'revolutionary, conservative or evolutionary'.

Herbert Gintis (1973: 38) outlines an economic Marxist critique of Illich from within capitalist societies, in it he, however, emphasizes the relevance of both Illich's thinking and his critique to the state socialist context in the following terms:

Throughout this paper, I restrict my analysis to capitalist as opposed to other economic systems of advanced industrial societies (e.g., state-socialism of the Soviet Union type). As Illich suggests, the outcomes are much the same, but the mechanisms are in fact quite different. The private-administrative economic power of a capitalist elite is mirrored by the public-administrative political power of a bureaucratic elite in state-socialist countries, and both are used to reproduce a similar complex of social relations of production and a structurally equivalent system of class relations.

In his analysis, Gintis (1973) puts forth the idea that what Illich describes as manipulation through educational institutions is in fact individual adaption within the context of social options available within capitalist societies, a feature which industrialized bureaucratic state socialist economies also share. In this, Gintis (1973: 40-42) sees a way forward not in operating on a discursive level (countering manipulation and rejection of institutionalized consumerist values) but in a different form of participatory democratic engagement in institutions within society. In Gintis' view (1973), this involves reorganizing productive processes more democratically starting from communities. He views this as compatible with a technologized society but in which technology operates differently. In this context, Illich's ([1970] 2004) centring on consumption as a core institutionalized value is countered by Gintis (1973) centring on production as the organizing principle that renders consumption one of the few modalities for individual identity expression. This criticism is doubled by that of Maxine Greene (1973) that sees Illich's ideas as mainly addressing the discursive and alienating dynamics of schooling without proposing a solution that would disempower the violent and racist power structures that keep schools from transforming. Her alternative is also to think about how teachers and schools act differently and how this can lead to transformations of power relations within wider society. For Greene (1973), ironically teachers are most interested in Illich's idea of deschooling because they feel that this form of 'pop educationalise' makes them feel as if the system would indeed be resting on their shoulders.

Taken together these two points of criticism elaborate precisely on the question of the relationship between schooling as a discourse that is reproduced in which consciousness is evaded and could be regained through deschooling and the socio-material and institutional arrangements that make schools what they are – which cannot be immediately transformed through working primarily on questions of consciousness. In this context, it becomes apparent that both Freire and Illich center oppression only to prescribe as a solution the raising of consciousness of those who are being oppressed, while leaving the socio-material conditions of this oppression initially intact.

Soviet Union based psychologist, Arthur V. Petrovsky, one of the coauthors of the UNESCO Faure report (Faure et al 1972), brought a criticism of Illich anchored in the

Soviet Union's experience with the expansion of public education through schooling that very much brought home the same two main points while also exposing the implicit views on youth that were carried into the discussion (Petrovsky, 1976). On the one hand, Petrovsky (1976) noted that without a transformation (akin to that in the Soviet Union) of the fundamental social and economic conditions of existence, people could not be moulded into harmonious and aware personalities that could defend their own right to education in line with the state socialist humanist ideal of the multifaceted personality development. On the other hand, Petrovsky (1976) saw in the critique of schooling an unsubstantiated glorification of youth that was also mirrored by a de-responsabilization of teachers (and adults of their generation) towards their (young) students. As such, the consumerist logic of 'the customer is always right' was provocatively reinscribed as 'youth is always right' (Petrovsky, 1976:60). Basically, for Petrovsky (1976) schooling is the only way to establish the preconditions for systematic thinking necessary for autonomous personalities in a way that would enable young people to fight against the barriers they face in accessing knowledge, vocation or employment.

5. Debates within the Romanian sociology of education and futurology

Petrovsky's (1976) point about the absolutization of the perspective of youth in the deschooling movement is an interesting starting point in exploring how this debate reached the Romanian sociology of education and futurology. On the one hand, youth studies were becoming a growing field of both social scientific and policy importance in Romania in the wake of the events of 1968 (Mărginean, 2019). In this context, ideas circulated relatively freely, across transnational and transideological boundaries during the 1970s (Mărginean, 2019) as part of a broader transnational circulation of expertise in the social sciences and beyond (Hîncu, 2018; Iacob et al; 2018). These were also in the context of Romania's youth policies that were becoming increasingly recognized and visible (see Mărginean, 2013), building on officially recognized youth cultures that could be contrasted to actually existing ones (Copilaş, 2019), as well as futurological research in relation to education (Apostol, 1977; Cătănuş, 2015). Ideas originating in this period, such as that of juventization of society came to influence discourses surrounding youth beyond the end of the Cold War (Wallace & Kovatcheva, 1998).

Writing at the intersection of futurology and education, Mircea Herivan (1976) explores intellectually the question of the crisis of education. At this point, he is already building on his previous extensive interviews with global persons in the field of education ranging from Bogdan Suchdolwski to Margaret Thatcher (1973). For Herivan (1976), in *Education in the Future Tense* (educație la timpul viitor), he addresses the move to localize education conducted in the Illichian tradition and building on the work of Holt. In his reading, localizing education as deeply embedded learning in neighbourhoods, factories and other places where people engage in meaningful activity, is problematic not as a

practice but in and through the engagement structures suggested by the proponents of deschooling. For them, in Herivan's (1976: 39) rendition, students should receive small amounts of time 'donated' by those engaged in activity in such places. The idea of 'donating' time invokes for Herivan (1976: 39) a hierarchical and problematic relationship in which education seizes to be a right and is solely based on the willingness of those who hold both knowledge and economic power to share (or not) their practical expertise. Therefore, for Herivan (1976: 39), this type of education is reminiscent of "education by stealth" conducted in the dire experience of being an apprentice to an owner. Moreover, mass schooling is preferable to deschooling because it offers fundamental education to a vast number of children and because it is 'perfectible' – it can be improved that offers the possibility for systematic intellectual development (Herivan, 1976: 43), echoing Petrovsky's take on the problems of deschooling.

In this same vein, Emil Păun (1982: 42), sociologist of education and socio-pedagogist, saw merit in the crisis of schooling thesis as defined by Coombs (1968). In Păun's reading (1982), the essential aspect of the world crisis of education is a temporal one, namely the problematization of a temporal disconnect between the demands of social developments and the development of schooling. While acknowledging the merits and existence of this disconnect, he strongly rejected the thesis of deschooling as 'destructive critique' practices by Illich, Freire and Reimer among others (Păun 1982: 43). For Păun (1982: 45), destructive criticism is embedded in the idea that 'the future of school is its demise'. Namely, he saw in the rejection of school and the proposal to eradicate schooling, especially in the context of developing countries that had not yet enjoyed the benefits of successful mass schooling, an attempt to deprive them of this opportunity as it has come within reach. In this light, they would be deprived of this essential stepping stone to development by overly expanding a form of criticism that shows the inadequacies of schooling in capitalist countries and most specifically, the USA. (Păun, 1982:45).

At this time, the educational system was expanding through schools and had an explicitly social mandate, for example Păun (1985:6) explained in his book *Socialism and the Right to Education* that the need for education emerges "as the expression of a range of requirements that society addresses at a given moment to the educational system regarding the number of individuals and the quality of their professional qualifications", while the demand for education emerges from the educational aspirations of individuals – pointing to two diverging paths. Education is imbued with both the psycho-individual dimension, as well as the social one and they meet in the need for more 'elevated social status'. However, Păun (1985:9) is also critical of the 'deification' of the school as a context that alone could bring about social equity and social prosperity. For Păun (1985), this disconnect between the inflated expectations of schooling, and the reality of

everyday schooling is where the 'pessimism' of the deschooling movement originates. For Păun (1985) generalizing Illich's idea of deschooling to the contexts of 'developing; countries is a masked way of demanding they not share in the positive socio-economic developments brought about by schooling. Moreover, the crisis of schooling manifests itself so visibly now due to the increased need and demand for education around the world. For Păun (1985), the self-referencing character of education, its' disconnect from the world of labor and its focus on preparing people for the next educational levels are problems that need to be solved. Moreover, these tendencies become more acute as economic crises put pressure on educational systems to use resources efficiently. In socialist countries, so Păun (1985) these disconnects are less widespread, as there is a constant policy effort to minimize them. Furthermore, in his view, the school is often tasked with solving and blamed for aggravating crises that lie outside of the educational system (like economic stagnation, unemployment, social inequity etc.). These in turn justify cost cuts that than disconnect those most marginalized from the possibility to participate socially later on. From this, his conclusion follows that the only way forward is through a constant qualitative improvement of schooling and better connection to knowledge production and production (as outlined in the Romanian educational policies of that time), as well as a socio-economic and political transformations outside of school without which changes to schooling would end up being pointless. For Păun (1982: 45) the crisis of schooling can only be comprehended in light of how school 'confirms and transcribes' inequalities from within society. That is why it cannot be viewed outside of these inequalities – the crisis of schooling needs to be read across the political and social system (Păun, 1982: 45). That is why, in his view, state socialist countries are in a better position for the development of schooling and its connection to social processes: by being able to connect directly schooling with production and research.

This point of the triple connection between schooling, production and research as the vehicle for overcoming the temporal disconnect inherent in the crisis of schooling, was widespread in the sociology of education in Romania at the time and came to be embedded in educational policies in the 1970s and early 1980s (see also Vlăsceanu 1979). Fred Mahler (1977; 1981; 1983) brings to the fore a synthesis of all these questions by engaging with the relationship youth and the older generations, as well as schooling and society, in an argument that ties both schooling to the transformation of ascribed professional status, as well as democratization to flexible pathways into academic and non-academic fields and democratic socialist participation in the workplace. For Mahler (1981) this was a particularly political question tied both to democratic socialism, participatory modes of engagement and school transformation of knowledge practices – however these took were articulated in relation to the ongoing educational reform to integrate education, production and research (Mahler, 1083). The

space does not allow to elaborate on these ideas further, but it is important to note the potential for reinscribing the relationship between schooling and society, as well as the creative-innovative and the reproductive character of schooling from within schooling that was prevalent at the time. Within Romanian sociologist of education circles, one point was clear school was imperfect, but worth defending from both a functionalist as well as a transformative perspective. This points in an interesting manner to both the critical engagement with the crisis of schooling, as well as a policy and systemic solution to the problems it posed – however, from a different perspective it can also be read as the onset of a moment in which what Jim Ferguson (1994) later called the 'anti-politics machine' – an approach to development though which political issues are constantly transformed into technical issue.

6. Concluding Discussion

The crisis of schooling as a world-wide phenomenon found its expression around the questions of whether there is a relationship between social transformation, social equity and schooling and whether this relationship is a discursive one concerning consciousness or a socio-material one concerning the means of production and reproduction of society. Interestingly, operating within a state socialist educational system and with a Marxist humanist vocabulary, Romanian sociologists of education and futurologists put forward relatively functionalistic accounts of schooling as meeting both (and primarily) socio-economic demands, as well as (somewhat secondarily) personal and collective aspirations for educational upward mobility. They resonated with Marxists critiques of Illich, such as that of Herbert Gintis, in that they saw the analysis of schooling one that needed to take more of the societal superstructure into account. However, they also defended schooling beyond this point and in and as an end in itself – limiting acceptable criticisms of schooling to its imperfections and thus foreclosing the potential to investigate structurally problematic modes of organizing learning and instruction processes. As such, they saw in schooling a transformative potential that they thought should not be overestimated in terms of how (fast) it can correct social inequities, but should also not be underestimated in terms of how it can be reconnected to social and economic developments, as well as rendered innovative in the quest for developing fully human capacities in the school aged population and beyond. In this, the crisis of schooling was resolved on a theoretical and policy level through being turned into a (rather complex) tame issue to be governed in mostly non-ideological terms. In this respect, it confirmed Illich's and Gintis' interpretations of the commonalities between state socialist and capitalist states understandings of schooling and laid the groundwork for the depoliticized educational governance practices through which subsequent crisis in and of education were governed.

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