

Introduction – Three Dimensions of Modern Society

In *The Civilizational Dimension of Modernity*, Eisenstadt points out two main dimensions of the concept of modernity and actually deals with a third one:

Firstly, he sees modernity as a distinct type of civilization carrying a promise in the sense that it is based on a cultural and political program which has grown out of the era of Enlightenment and the great 18th century revolutions. The visions of this program can be summarized as the emancipation from the fetters of traditional cultural and political authority; the possibility of taking a variety of roles; reflexivity; the continuous expansion of the realm of personal and institutional freedom and activity; autonomous access and participation of members of society in the social and political order and its constitution; and the belief in the possibility of active formation of society by conscious human activity (Eisenstadt, 2004: 50).

Secondly, the program of modernity entailed a radical transformation of the conceptions and premises of the political order combining orientations of rebellion with strong orientations to centre-formation and institution building. One aspect of this was a strong connection between the construction of territories, political boundaries, and cultural communities. Another was the distinction between the bearers of the modern programme and “the others.” A third and just as important one was the potential contradictions between the basic premises of the cultural and political programmes of modernity and the major institutional developments of modern societies (Eisenstadt, 2004: 51-53).

Thus, thirdly, the development and expansion of modernity were not peaceful but interwoven with internal and external conflicts rooted in the

contradictions of capitalism, national or transnational tensions of the modern state and imperialist systems leading to demands for democratization, rebellion, and war. Among the risks and threats of the more or less autonomous forces of globalization Eisenstadt mentions the international scale of migration, problems of social inequality, political violence and delinquency. To this he adds the rather more inostentatious dimensions of “disenchantment” and strong control inherent in a bureaucratized society (Eisenstadt, 2004: 53, 59-60).

These three dimensions of modern society: its promises, its institutionalization, and its risks and threats, constitute the backcloth of the development of educational initiatives in Europe. However, the backcloth can be embroidered on by adding a few perspectives on the task of education offered by classical educational theory.

The Role of Education in Modern Society

In the wake of the French revolution, Kant published an answer to the question: What is enlightenment? His answer was: man’s exit from his self-inflicted immaturity. Take courage to use your ability to think! He admits that modern man in his role as a part in a bureaucratic “machine” may have to restrain himself, but as a member of the public and in particular as a knowledgeable person his reasoning must be unrestricted for the benefit of the common good. And no epoch could be allowed to restrict the opportunities of the next to develop its understanding, overcome its errors, and proceed in its enlightenment (Kant, 1784).

A little more than hundred years later Durkheim, faced with the full impact of the social changes of modern society, asked a different question. Concerned with what he saw as the problem of social cohesion, he believed that its solution rested on the development of a type of solidarity