On the futures of popular adult education in the era of lifelong learning

At least on a rhetorical level, the catchwords of French revolution - freedom, equality and fraternity - are still, in the beginning 21st century, brought forward as guiding principles for the popular adult education practices in the Nordic countries. For example, study circles, which are still often presented as a Nordic, often especially a Swedish invention for promoting popular education, are presented as functioning according to the three above mentioned principles and ideals. But how equal and democratic are the popular adult education practices? Considering for example the fact that involvement in these practices is quite distorted. Adult educations associations (in Sweden and Norway) and adult education centres (in Finland) have traditionally been populated mainly by well-educated women between 30 and 50 years of age. Folk high schools seem still to be populated by young adults, mainly by “mature teenagers” in their early twenties (e.g. Määttä & Yrjölä 2001, 73-74; Sveriges officiella statistik 2003, 22; Undervisningsministeriet 2002, 11; Statistisk Centralbyrå 1998, 9,12).

Another question one might want to ask in the beginning of the 21st century, is how the different organizations within popular education are doing about century after they were established? A quick look at statistics1 considering participants and hours of study, in the different popular education organizations in the Nordic countries around the turn of millennium, reveals that the situation differ quite distinctly from one country to another. Folk high schools and especially adult education associations in Finland seem to do extremely well, whereas folk high schools in Denmark, especially their traditional core activity, the long courses (Højskoleudvalget 2004, 8) and adult educations associations in Norway seem to be on retreat on the adult education market. The first conclusion to be drawn is that the popular education in the Nordic countries is still popular, but not equally popular within different groups of citizens or the different countries.

Three scenarios for popular education in the Nordic countries

In the following three, partly complementary and partly contradictory future scenarios for popular education in the Nordic countries are sketched, mainly on the basis of reflections presented quite recently by Nordic adult educators. Antikainen and Kauppila (2002) as well as Suoranta (2000) focus is mainly on the current state of affairs, whereas Gustavssons (2002) perspective is historical and philosophical, with it’s roots in the Swedish tradition of folk enlightenment.

The first scenario is based on endorsement of the ongoing development within adult education and the societies at large within the Western world. Popular education is looked at partly as an instrument among the other instruments of the labour market to be constantly refined, partly as an instrument to be used to minimize the disturbances and the detriments caused by the process in hand. Alternatively popular education is treated as a commodity among other commodities on a globalized adult education market. The participants are looked at, not anymore as enlightened social citizens (Korsgaard 2001b, 78-79), rather as active citizens, referring foremost to skilled and efficient members of the working life organizations and associations. They are not supposed to reflect on or question the development in hand. Rather, they are expected to become fully involved in a continuous pursuit of new, even more

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1 Some overall statistics on participation and hours of study within the different popular education organizations in the four Nordic countries are presented in Appendix I. The statistics ought to be quite comparable between the different countries but should anyhow to be interpreted with great cautiousness.
effective solutions and means, if necessary in teams together with others. The heritage and the means of folk enlightenment, such as study circles, are refreshed and updated, in conformity with the requirements of late modern times.

Popular education, if still to be looked at as a specific field of adult education, has firstly to re-legitimate its own existence on the education market by proving its efficiency and quality according to the standards in-use for the moment and secondly function as an effective instrument for mediating the really useful knowledge and the qualifications as well as promoting flexibility, maybe not anymore within the realms of nation-state, but rather on inter-national arenas. The standardization and the transparency of educational services and products (the commodities), which has to do with the re-legitimation of the popular education practices, are elaborated and refined in order to be able to guarantee the outcomes on short term. Thereby the main focus is on the formal learning environments and those with necessary skills and motivation for effective studies form the main targets groups, referring to well educated middle class women (Antikainen & Kauppila 2002, 218; Suoranta 2000, 365-366). There is some tentative evidence showing how the demand on profiling the popular education supply, promoted by educational authorities after the economic depression in the beginning of the 1990’s, has already lead, in the case of the adult education centres (within the Swedish-speaking regions in Finland), to a greater self-selection of the participants, As a result the participants already active, meaning middle aged middle class women, have become even a more active and distinguished group, formulating the contents and methods for future supply by their activity. At the same time, the individuals in the groups participating only casually and incidentally have been deported, if not to the margins but at least to the no man’s land within adult education (Salo 2004, 93-98). The organizations within popular education are forced to face and cope with the fact that nothing can anymore be taken for granted. They have to continuously re-negotiate and re-sell their services and products, primarily on the local educational market (e.g. Runarsdotter 2004).

This scenario (re)reflects both the essentialistic and the progressivistic philosophy of folk enlightenment. Active citizenship can be understood as an up-dated and “late modernized version” of civic education of the pre-industrial times. Scientific knowledge communicated by experts has been replaced with really useful knowledge available on the market (still defined and produced by someone). Socialization of the man is furthered, not through work in industry but through knowledge work in the post-industrial society. The vanishing of spare time beyond work reminds of the situation during the beginning of industrialization. The nature of the challenges has been diversified, but there are still problems to be solved and challenges to be met. Interest in and emphasis on problem-based learning is one proof of this. Knowledge has till to be integrated with use of equipment, computers and Internet instead of mechanical machines. Self-education, emphasizing the experiences of the persons involved, is still used as a rhetorical instrument (Gustavsson 1991, 245-246; Gustavsson 2002, 88-93).

Within the second scenario main focus lies on, firstly preserving and maintaining some of the traditional functions of popular education, secondly supporting citizens as individual in their everyday attempts to cope with the increasing complexity and with the uncertainties of the late modern. The aspect of preservation is based on reproduction of the aspects of societal life, which have been defined as valuable within a certain community. Popular education functions as a vehicle to both communicate and pass on a cultural heritage, a certain identity, a value-system or given traditions within the community. According to Gustavsson (2002, 96-97) the function of preservation can be looked at as an expression of a perennialistic philosophy united to a neo-humanistic philosophy of education. Within the Anglo-Saxon world this forms of adult education has traditionally been labelled liberal adult education. One important aspect of it is the capacity of the individuals to effectively cope with the information and knowledge available. Besides a need of communities with strong common
value-systems, functioning at times as a safe havens for the individuals, emphasis is placed on 
exploration and restoration of the identities, life histories and life styles of the individuals. 
Popular education has a strong restorative and therapeutic function rather than an educational 
or an intermediary function. Different kinds of healing and restorative experiences and 
techniques are put on the front. They are supposed improve the individuals’ ability to confront 
and cope with the complexities and insecurities on all levels and spheres of human and 
societal life. Another survival skill has to do with the need of being able to orientate oneself in 
the never-ending landscapes of opportunities and choices (Antikainen & Kauppila 2002, 19- 
20; Suoranta 2000, 366). Educators are not supposed to be experts on any specific contents, 
rather on effective instruments for example crisis management and therapeutic intercourse and 
interaction. At times, educators might have to manage crisis within groups, communities or 
even whole nations.

The third scenario relies on the need of and possibility to resuscitate and revitalize the 
Josipovitch and radical functions of popular education, the characteristics of popular adult 
education in the late 19th and the early 2000th century. This scenario implies a reinvention of 
social engagement and the political aspects of the everyday life. Further, it implies a 
restoration of the edifying and the value rational mission of popular education, by which 
popular education is able to constitute a serious alternative to mainstream adult education. 
Reconstructivity, based at least partly on deliberative discourses and communicative 
rationality, form as a basis for critical education and radical democracy. The critical aspect 
implies, besides an ongoing critical and reciprocal reflections on the activities oneself is 
involved in, a critical reflection on the prerequisites of democracy as well as different kinds of 
social and societal practices and reforms. Reconstructivity can be looked at as based on a 
knowledge sociological view in reality. When reality, especially the social aspects of it, is 
understood as social construction it naturally becomes an open subject for reflections, 
dialogues and negotiations. Even socially constructed definitions and categorizations, often 
used to explain differences considering participation in adult education, becomes open for 
reflections and critical scrutiny. An intensive and ongoing critical reflection on the central 
aspects and practices of the life world is also supposed to reveal, not only the socially defined 
aspects of knowledge, but also the contemporary emphasis on cognitive and psychological 
aspects of knowledge (Gustavsson 2002, 93-96).

If popular education is to succeed in restoring at least some of it’s traditional value 
rational nature and become a meaningful opportunity and a place of both residence and 
resistance it would have to; firstly react on the complexities, insecurities and risks 
characteristic for the late modern in a critical and composed manner, secondly offer 
individuals possibilities for sharing significant and holistic learning experiences with the 
significant others at the turning points of life, and thirdly provide human beings with means 
for acting together with others in order to be able to question and transform the state of 
affairs, both considering adult education and the society at large. Popular educators should 
focus on supporting the construction and development of empowering and critical educational 
settings and practices based on a respect for the multiplicity of forms for everyday life and 
especially a humble idea of good life. These practices and settings should be based on real 
possibilities for self-actualization together with and with respect to ones fellows, not merely 
self-realization as restoration of the self. Both considering knowledge and social life, the 
spirituality could be brought forward as an organic ingredient of human meaning making and 
life. As in the very beginning, popular education should rely on commitment rather than on 
institutionalised expertise (Antikainen & Kauppila 2002, 218; Nordhaug 1986; Suoranta 
2000, 366-367). This scenario could be realized by restoring the liberating forms of 
community education, grounded on locality, sense of community, active engagement and 
involvement as well as the identification and mobilization of the internal resources available
in every community (Brookfield 1983, 66-70). The liberating aspect, when reflected from the viewpoint of globalized the late modern, would require community education to open up, expand the horizon of activities from a certain geographical locality to the global arenas and gang up with the new action-oriented social movements.

The context of the scenarios for popular education – the era of lifelong learning

In the following, the three scenarios will be elaborated and discussed in wider framework of contemporary adult education within the Anglo-Saxon world. The idea of and concept lifelong learning, was reintroduced soon after the deep recession in the beginning of the 1990’s, firstly in the policy documents within the enlarged European union and quite soon thereafter in the writings of for example economists and educationalists. Since that, it been accompanied by other concepts, expressing phenomenon’s deeply rooted in the history and tradition of popular education in the Nordic countries; social capital, active citizenship, civil society and political education to name a few. Though, policy makers and educationalists have confiscated the vocabulary characteristic of popular and social movements of the pre-industrial era. Even if there seem, at least considering rhetoric’s, to be “a suspiciously unchallengeable consensus” considering the concepts in question, one can easily identify differing and competing constructions and discourses. Though, the varying and alternative discourses and stories of lifelong learning “bubbling under” the surface are overshadowed by one predominant story, the one focusing the needs of economy and the requirements on ever changing (labour) market (Mayo 2000, 24)

Concepts such as ‘lifelong learning’, ‘active citizenship’ and ‘social capital’ are “essentially contested concepts”, implying a normative and appraisive content, by involving and mobilizing complex problems and issues and by being open for varying and contradictory interpretations. They can be considered as ambiguous cluster concepts, possible to be “connected to a changing repertoire of complementary concepts that by a closer inspection are ambiguous and contested too” (Haas 2001, 45). Furthermore they can be looked at as both-and concepts, reflecting the new and creative “freedoms” of the second modern rather than either-or concepts used to mould the basic oppositions of the first modernity (Beck 2000, 53-55). Social capital, when interpreted with an ideological twist is probably the example of a contested both-and concept. Further, the concepts in question have another essential attribute; they embrace the whole world or at the least the major aspects of human life. For example, lifelong learning has been fabricated as a context, as a basis or prerequisite of successful life, as a process as well as an outcome and result of the previous (Edwards 2000, 3). This holds also for the other concepts in question. They can be related to and reflected on in a framework with its origins in the different approaches to learning, the humanistic, the constructivist, the behaviourist and the socio-cultural.

### THE CONTEXT

| BASIS | PREREQUISITES | PROCESS | MEANS | OUTCOME | RESULT |

FIGURE 1. A framework for identifying e.g. different approaches to learning
In order to be able to anticipate the future one has to remind oneself of the nearby history, in this particular case of the swift transition from education to learning. The notion of lifelong education brought forward by UNESCO in the beginning of the 1970’s and even earlier represented a humanistic and holistic philosophy focusing on the actualization and realization of human potential – the self - as a whole, a goal to be realized within a humane vision of society and international order. It’s bedfellow, the OECD concept of recurrent education shared, despite the mobilization of human capital and the emphasis on learning within formal settings and training for work the, same undertone (Edwards 2000, 5-7; Griffin, 1999; Korsgaard 2002; 162-167).

The concepts discussed above are in the following used to construct a larger framework for discussing and reflecting on the futures of popular education as well as adult education as a whole. The both-and character of the combination-concepts gives one a possibility to identify two separate or connected spheres of which the first one represents the traditional domain of Nordic conception of popular education and the Anglo-Saxon conception of community education and the second one the contemporary conception adult and continuing education in the era of lifelong learning.

![Diagram of spheres of lifelong education and lifelong learning](image)

FIGURE 2. The spheres of lifelong education and lifelong learning

According to “the very idea” of the late modern, the scope of the concepts has been extended. This holds also for the concept of capital. Beyond referring to (large) sums of money, buildings or machinery, capital is within the late modern knowledge-based economy mostly used to refer to the activities and capabilities characteristic of human beings such as social relations and bonding, learning by individuals and groups, creativity, spirituality and ethics just name a few. In one way the capitalization of the human traits and capabilities could also be looked at as a process of democratisation. Capital (written with capital C), earlier beyond the reach of the ordinary citizen of the welfare state is nowadays close at hand, or to be more precise close at head for example for the millions of participants at the Adult Educations Associations in Sweden and Norway as well as the participants of the Adult education centres.

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2 Somehow contemporary use of capital as social capital could be understood as “per capitalization”, per capita referring to the amount of something as “the total amount of it in a country or area divided by the number of people in that country or area” (Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 2003, 1064)
in Finland. No wonder that social scientists at large as well as adult educators and the representatives for the tradition of Nordic popular education has lately been so eagerly discussing democracy and the different forms of it. If taken this discussion and the outcomes of it seriously one could maintain that the Folk High Schools are the Schools of Economics of the late modern. Maybe one should also reintroduce and reformulate the Freirean concept of banking education. The means to handle and control the (new) situation in hand has so far been brought from the past. As a result we have been witnessing an industrialization and ‘commodification’ of culture, learning, human creativity and spirituality. But the industrializing of the human capabilities might as well give the citizens of the post-nation-states capacity to undercut the dependence (Milani 2002, 49) quite loosely built in the post-industrial teamwork within in the flat and flexible learning organizations.

**An extended framework for future scenarios**

The two spheres of adult education presented above does not correspond with the three scenarios brought forward earlier. Therefore the framework with the two triangles has to be elaborated. Schuller (2004) presents an extensive conceptual framework, which can be used to grasp and understand the complex and multiple relationships between human capabilities, learning processes as well as the initiators, meaning and outcomes of learning on individual, communal and societal level. This framework, illustrated as a triangle, consists of three disciplinary poles; a political, a psychological and an economical pole. The prefix socio is added to all of the three disciplinary poles. The means and outcomes of learning at the three poles are named as different forms of capital; the concept of social capital at the political pole, the concept of identity capital at the psychological pole and the concept of human capital at the economical pole. Different kinds of human capabilities and assets are connected to the different forms of capitals. Social capital has mainly to do with the social ties within family, friends and social networks, with civic participation and the attitudes and values, such as trust, characteristic for meaningful social relationships. The concept of identity capital is based on self-concept, plans and goals on individual level, enjoyment and the intrinsic motivation to learn. Identity capital is mainly used to refer to the intangible assets, meaning specific characteristics of personality, for example self-esteem, sense of purpose in life, ego strength and internal locus of control. Finally human capital is related to formal qualifications, knowledge and skills.

Usher (1998, 57-59) argues that contemporary mainstream adult education paradigms, focusing the characteristics of adulthood and stressing production as a learning site, have lost their explanatory and instrumental relevance. Thereafter he identifies and four contemporary social practices of adult learning. I shall relate the social practices in question to the three forms of capital presented above. Firstly, **critical practices** are related to the social capital pole. They can be related to multiplicity of sites and take various forms. The educational organizations can function as sites for critical practices, even if they in the main are to be found outside them. Critical practices are spontaneous and action-orientated, apt to take up a struggle against the dominance of structures, values, lifestyles or unequal distribution of power or influence. **Vocational practices**, with a strong emphasis on adaptation to the needs of the socio-economic system and especially the market of knowledge production, are related to the human capital pole. These practices are pre-disposed to development and change. Applicability and flexibility are looked at the main features of knowledge and skills. Thirdly, both **confessional** and **lifestyle practices** are related to the identity capital pole. Confessional practises are orientated towards consuming and realizing “the self” in oneself. The emphasis is on searching for and discovering over and over again the hidden meanings and potentials within oneself. Personality is, like WebPages in the cyberspace, under ongoing construction.
Once the one has again found oneself, this has to be revealed and confessed to the non-significant others by constantly talking about oneself and sharing the most private aspects of ones life with others. Also lifestyle practices are based on a constant emphasis on self-expression. Though, the focus is on incessant remaking of oneself rather than constant re-finding of oneself. The self-consciousness is constructed and kept up by style, image, fashion and taste. Every thinkable aspect of life has self-referential meaning. Consumption of educational as well as pleasure services is understood as a signifier of difference. The insatiable need remaking oneself by consuming counts also for learning activities.

Boshier (1997, 269-272), when discussing the future scenarios for adult education in Hong Kong, present a four paradigm model to identify different fundamental ways of thinking about adult education. The model is based on two dimensions; an ontological dimension consisting of objectivist and subjectivist positions and a power relation’s dimension. The latter dimension is based on a position in which the existing power relations are questioned and challenged and a position in which these relations are reinforced. Three of the four paradigms identified can directly be related to the future scenarios presented in the triangle model. The rationalistic-positivistic structural functionalism paradigm corresponds with the human capital pole. It is based firstly on maintaining the existing social order by promoting consensus and integration (that is inclusion). Secondly, gradual development and continuing growth, is furthered by a highly objectivistic social engineering attitude. No matter what the nature or the cause of the problems might be, practical, instrumental and effective short-term solutions are preferred ahead of other kind of solutions. Within the interpretive paradigm, corresponding with the identity capital pole, the main devotion is firstly to adopt the life world frame of reference of the adult learner and secondly to understand the subjectively construed meanings within this framework. Besides this individual starting point emphasis is also placed on shared meanings within a certain shared social reality. The outlook on human affairs is ordered, cohesive and integrated. Within the radical humanist paradigm, the aim is to transform radically the existing power relations and the social arrangements based on these relations. The ambition is to activate and emancipate people to become aware of the existing modes of domination, to induce them to critically analyse themselves in relation to modes of domination, to reconstruct their views and finally take, together with others appropriate action. Praxis is understood as a reflection followed by action.

Korsgaard (2001b, 12-14) presents a didactic triangle for teaching democratic citizens. This triangle, build up by three fundamental and interdependent categories, knowledge and understanding, skills and competencies and values and dilemmas, is in the following used in a slightly different manner in order to make it correspond with the overall framework under construction. Knowledge and understanding are related to the social capital pole. The emphasis is put on the knowledge, which can be considered as essential and momentous for becoming involved, that is willing and being (cap)able to act, in the everyday life of ones own community. Understanding, in the sense of making meaning of the actions of oneself in a context of continuous interaction and dialogue with ones fellows, is understood as the outcome of actions and actions. Skills and competencies, as the main indicators of human capital, are defined rather instrumentally, as flexible and adaptive tools for problem solving, development and change. The adequacy and value of the skills and competencies are constantly evaluated and redefined on the (labour) market. Values and dilemmas are of course brought up in the interaction within a community, but defined here mainly from a personal identity construction, preservation and rehabilitation point of view. The constant need for re-realization, that is expressing and confessing oneself, becomes worthy from the viewpoint of the individual only if there is an audience to relate to. The non-significant others are also the significant ones. Confessional lifestyles practices are based on “some kind of” common fluid framework of values, and the dilemma consists of the loose coupled nature of the relationship.
between the personified individual and the ramshackle value-framework. So for, values with dilemmas or dilemmas with values would probably be a more accurate designation. The result of the presentation of the different approaches and viewpoints above is summarized and illustrated in the figure below.

![Figure 3](image-url)

**FIGURE 3.** An extended framework for the future scenarios of popular education

**The future(s) of popular education according to the umbrella organizations for popular adult education in the Nordic countries**

One of the tasks of the umbrella organizations for popular adult education in the Nordic countries is, besides coordinating popular education policies and activities on a national and international level, to prepare the organizations within popular education for the challenges of the future. One of the main instruments to be used for fulfilling this task is the production of different kinds of visionary documents. Both the Danish Council For Adult education and the Swedish Council of Popular education have quite recently published their visions for popular education in Denmark and Sweden. The Finnish Adult Education Association published their latest vision for five years ago³. In the following these three visionary documents are analysed and reflected on in a quite cursory manner. The focus is on the published documents and their

contents, not on the processes by which the documents have been produced or the intended purposes or functions of them. The main goal is to relate the visions brought forward in the documents to the framework presented above.

**Three scenarios for the Danish popular education**

The future for Danish popular education (Dansk Folkeoplysnings Samråd 2004) is exhibited as three differing and incompatible scenarios. These three scenarios are built up on reflections considering the core values, the organization, the main target-groups and the channels for and characteristics of communication. Within the first of the scenarios, named popular education as a part of the established educational system, the main task of popular education is to complete and inspire the existing educational system, mainly by supplying continuing education for everybody, according to the policy lifelong education and with respect to the immediate on the labour market. Popular education will be publicly funded, the ordinary citizens will be offered a Lifelong Learning - punch ticket meanwhile the educationally less well of are firmly kept hold of until they find out what they are able and willing to do (Man skal kort sagt holde fast i folk, mens de bliver klar over, hvad de kan og vil. Ibid. 10). One of the main aims for popular education is to become something worthwhile, something worth to be paid for (ibid. 11.) The main aim of the second scenario, named popular education as a spare-time occupation, is to offer all the inhabitants eventful spare-time activities. Organizations within popular education compete with the commercial suppliers of spare-time services and finance their activities participation fees. The organizations are also supposed to get together and confess to a common-value system (Det er muligt at definiera et faelles værdigrundlag. Hvis organisationerne ikke vil inordne sig under det, kan de ikke være med i fælleskabet (DFS). Ibid. 13). Within the third scenario for the Danish popular education, named citizenship as a frame and ideal for popular education, the main aim is to educate and inspire the citizens to get involved in the public debate and participate in the realization of democracy mainly on the local level. Popular education is defined as a free, comprehensive and pluralistic space within the society. One of the functions of popular education is to constitute a critical and even utopian counterculture by contrasting pictures of the situation in hand:

Folkeoplysningen har en rolle som “MOD-borgersk ap” ved at være kritisk, ved at give folk mulighed for at vælge deres egen holding og ved at lade forskellige holdingar mødes. [ ] Utopi, modbillede, autonomi er muligheder for folkeoplysningen. At skabe mydiggørelse og udvikle kvalificeret kritik og brokkeri (som modspil til okvalificeret brokkeri). (ibid. 16)

**Future popular education in Sweden – furthering multiplicity and pluralism in communities**

The future scenario for popular education, presented in the document published by the Swedish Council of Popular Education (Folkbildningsrådet 2004), rely quite clearly on the traditional value-system and ideals for popular education in Sweden. The ideological foundation is constituted by a great confidence in the intrinsic forces of human beings and their potentials for development. Within communities and within the society this is reflected in the intrinsic value of knowledge and education, the individual freedom considering involvement in learning processes (based on cooperation, dialogue and reflection), the importance of the influence of the participants, engagement in the public sphere and the close connection to the popular movements (Ibid. 10). Popular education in the future can be defined as popular education for everybody, with a basis within the local communities but also with the capacity and means to expand to the societal and global arenas in order to further a multicultural values, global solidarity and sustainable development. Popular education is looked at as an active participant and noteworthy force in the formation of the
future society. The multiple practices within popular education form “a continuing education” in democratic citizenship, defined mainly in the framework of deliberative democracy:

..att varje människa kan tillägna sig förmågan att lyssna och förstå, ta till sig argument och argumentera för sin sak, ha förmåga att göra kompromisser och acceptera olikheter (Ibid. 13).

Organizations within popular education also form an important arena for expressing and experiencing culture in its widest sense as well as an arena for enhancing enabling creativity. Though, popular education is not defined merely by referring to the existing organizations and institutions, popular education can also occur outside them. But this does not mean that popular education in the future would be defined as a radical counteracting force, rather as a force with the ability to renew the established organizations and practices from inside or as a nursery for new kinds of associations or social movements. It is interesting to notice that the popular education organizations in Sweden are (even in the future) defined as quite independent when it comes to the relationship to the educational system at large. Finally, the furthering of the personal development of the individuals is looked as intimately connected to the development of the pluralistic communities within the society.

Future popular education in Finland – in-service-training for the personified citizens

The Finnish Adult Education Association (Samverkande bildningsorganisationerna 2000) defined some years ago three independent main tasks as a basis for the vision of the future for popular education in Finland. First of all, popular education should still, as it has strived for during the last century, support the development of versatile personality mainly by offering Finns the possibility to study arts, philosophy of life and handicraft that is recreational activities on their spare-time. Secondly, popular education should strengthen civil society by offering educational services for communities, associations and federations. Thirdly, popular education should strengthen the basis for democracy and democratic values by supporting personal independency and by developing citizen’s ability to cooperate and make liable discernments (Ibid. 8-9). The means for realizing the future tasks are presented as a thirteen-item programme. These items are strongly characterized by formal educational activities, either within or tightly coupled to the existing educational system. The vocabulary used to describe how adults are to be engaged differs considerably from the open and flexible learning vocabulary characteristics for the era of lifelong learning. Expressions and concepts such as studies, study programmes, study projects, study groups, study counselling and accreditation of prior learning are reiterated throughout the thirteen-item program. These concepts reflect the history of popular education in Finland, the close connection between the state and the organizers of popular education as well as the ongoing confidence in learning, or rather studies organized within or in connection to the formal educational contexts. When specific groups or communities, for example pensioners, social dropouts or civic organizations are mentioned, the immediate focus is on creation of possibilities for learning and studying within the existing educational system. To sum up the future vision for the Finnish popular education, or rather liberal adult education, one can define it as in-service-training for the personified citizens.

The futures of popular education in Nordic countries related to the framework

As a conclusion the framework for future scenarios for popular education are used to put the futures for popular education organizations in the three Nordic countries in relation to each other. When the vision of the future is presented using alternative scenarios, in the case of Denmark three scenarios, it can be understood as open. The three scenarios presented for
popular education in Denmark correspond closely with the three scenarios in the overall framework. In the case of Sweden, as it is with Finland, the future is sketched mainly as one (desirable) scenario. In both cases the future scenarios rely heavily on the “national traditions” considering popular education. In Sweden the emphasis is, in accordance with the study circle tradition, on democratic and deliberative, but not expressly radical practices, within different kinds of existing groups and communities. The aspect of identity capital and personal development is out of sight. In the case of Finland the situation is somehow the opposite. If the future tasks of popular education, as presented by the Finnish Adult Education Association (see above) also represent an order of preference, popular education in Finland will be focused on furthering the accumulation of identity and human capital.

![Image of diagram]

FIGURE 4. The futures of popular education in the three Nordic countries

When one relates the different future strategies to the statistics considering the volume of popular education in the three countries under scrutiny it seems as if the principle of open futures, presented as alternative scenarios (the case of Denmark), is not as successful as one scenario focusing the individuals within the framework of the educational system (the case of Finland). Or should the alternative scenarios for popular education in Denmark to be interpreted as a reaction and response to the fact that popular education has been forced to retreat?
References


Sveriges officiella statistik 2003
