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## **The City as a Curriculum Resource: Pedagogical Avant-Garde and Urban Literacy in Europe, ca 1900-1920**

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# The City as a Curriculum Resource: Pedagogical Avant-Garde and Urban Literacy in Europe ca 1900-1920

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## **Abstract**

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The concept of “metropolitan pedagogy” got foothold in larger urban areas in Central Europe during the years before the First World War. The advocates of this loosely organized reform movement – predominantly progressive primary school teachers in rapidly growing German speaking towns like Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg and Vienna – emphasized urban space as a learning environment and curriculum resource of outmost importance. They experimented with excursions, object lessons and new textbooks to “adjust” the official school curriculum to real life situations and demands. They also sought to practice the conviction that the city could serve as a vehicle for democratic culture and community awareness and function as a negotiation platform to tackle the knowledge inflation of modern society.

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**Keywords:** urban education, city children, literacy, social ecology, John Dewey.

**T**he relationship between urban environment and education has been characterized by dynamic shifts during the twentieth century. Time-periods of enforced urban development and raptures in urban economy and culture have automatically resulted in an intensified attention towards the upbringing, the everyday circumstances and the education of children. The urban crisis in Western Europe in the 1960s and 1970s is one striking example of such a period. The political attention and the critical research being done on children and urban schooling during these decades addressed the complexity of education and social change: “[The] school is always part of a social unit – and its social setting and its particular environment exert powerful influences on the children’s values and attitudes” (Mays, 1962, p. 2ff.).

During these decades there existed a persuading wish to re-establish a connection between social life, social knowledge and urban environment the way these components were believed to have co-existed previously, before modern planning and sprawling suburbs and highways dissolved it. Contemporary social debate revealed a notion that children in cities ones had had access to their own local sphere, like a habitat, a social and cognitive completeness like a closed treasury box full of valuable relations and valuable knowledge. The American education historian Daniel Calhoun wrote in 1969 that post-war urban planning actually had crushed a system of cognitive exchange that used to be a power source for the social and economic modernisation of Western European cities: that the city was an educational institution of its own: “The city has been intruding into the learning process as a kind of Automatic Teaching Environment – poorly and chaotically programmed, but effective for all that...” (Calhoun, 1969, p. 312).

Today we are ones again experiencing an intense refashion or re-coding of the city’s role in the social system, due to the fundamental impact of information technology, global movements of finances and people, paired with the drawbacks of state regulations. And ones again the education system stands in focus of attention.

### **The pedagogical reform and urban society 1900**

In this article, I will turn my attention to the impact of urban environment on educational development and pedagogical thinking in the early twentieth century. During the mature phase of industrialisation and urbanisation around 1900 in Western Europe, advocates of school reform searched for a “lost” social connection that they had difficulties finding in the contemporary situation. Progressive teachers and intellectuals, both in Europe and in America, did not usually trust the environment that existed immediately at hand. In their perspective, the modern urban environment did provide the most suitable context, reference and resonance to the work of the school.

John Dewey had in *The School and Society* reacted against this intellectual distrust of the industrial society and given the teachers in the cities the task of restoring the values that were behind the factory buildings and industrial complexes, the values upheld by social ties, of families and neighbourhoods. According to Dewey was the contemporary problems not the result of some kind of degeneration of society's vital functions due to the economic development or a sudden widespread ignorance of that which still constituted the great moral issues - honesty, thrift, community - but to "an inability to appreciate the social environment that we live in today" (Dewey, 1897, p. 21 ff.).

But there were exceptions. During the 1910s and 1920s the concept of *Großstadtpädagogik* got foothold in pedagogical practice and debate in larger urban areas in Germany and Austria. The advocates of this loosely organized reform movement – predominantly progressive primary school teachers in rapidly growing cities like Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg and Vienna – emphasized urban space as a learning environment of utmost importance. They experimented with excursions, object lessons and new textbooks to “adjust” the official school curriculum to real life situations and demands. They also sought to practice the conviction that the city could serve as a vehicle for democratic culture and community awareness.

The metropolitan educators have been mentioned in previous research as a somewhat surprising variation of the classical progressive reform movement that supposedly was very critical towards urban expansion. Reform teachers like Fritz Gansberg and Heinrich

Scharrelmann wanted the pedagogical practice to overcome the phobias of the big city. This was not to be interpreted as an approximation, but as a processing of the conditions. Urban children lived in environments of learning that needed recognition. And for the educational reform moment this consideration should not be seen as a limitation.

Previous research has underestimated the holistic approach of the urban educators. The mature urbanized society constituted the integrated environment for education, manifested in electricity, exhibitions, in department stores, communication, banking and trade- and copyright regulations to order a highly developed society of contracts. This endeavour resulted in an awareness of “place” and a rediscovery of the parochial as a resource, which rendered the concept of urbanization a qualitative meaning that permeated the renaissance and self-consciousness of European cities in the beginning of twentieth century and in the interwar years. Urbanization was not merely referring to the masses of immigrating land workers pouring into towns, but to the measurements activated to shape a functioning society based on the belief of a new urban culture.

Several urban schoolteachers understood this development also as an impetus for changing the structure and the role of especially primary education. The public primary school should be regarded as an institution for *the creation of a future human capital*. And if urban public schools did not incorporate the principles of social equality and practical learning in their daily work and did not try to abolish the traditional authoritarian and confessional structures of teaching, the future human capital would lose its value.

The holistic approach of the metropolitan educators also included elementary skills, as could be seen in the efforts made in textbook productions and didactical renewal of ABC books for the youngest pupils. The educational effort of the metropolitan instructors was to embed the subjects of teaching, and especially reading and writing exercises, in a recognizable and meaningful context - the urban environment as the child's home environment. The ambitions went beyond the purely technical skills to teach reading and writing: literacy carried the possibilities of independence and communications and thereby the ability for the individual child to find a meaningful

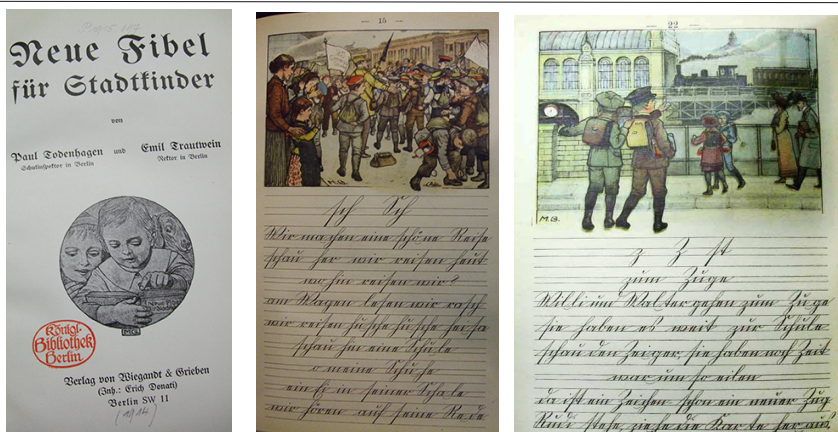
position in relation to urban society's increasing demands for rationality, specialization and autonomy.

### The Textbooks of Urban Literacy

Fritz Gansberg, a primary school teacher in Bremen, was one of the leading figures of this opposition. The explicit purpose of his textbook from 1904, *Streifzüge durch die Welt der Großstadtkinder* (“Strolls in the World of Big City Children”), was “to conquer a new field for the object teaching, namely the field of urban culture”. According to Gansberg, the urban child “...did not have everyday experiences of nature, and since nature was not alive, then neither could the words of the teacher come alive” (Gansberg, 1904, p. 1ff.).

Gansberg’s program became the point of departure for other instructors to integrate the urban environment in teaching that previously had been held outside. In the years before the 1914, a series of alternative textbooks were produced blending lists of vocabulary, simple descriptions of innovation and infrastructure with overviews of the urban landscape. Instead of the common static visualisation on large boards in the classroom, direct interaction with the surrounding environment was emphasized through excursions and projects. The city itself was used as an “object lesson”.

Picture 1. Examples of a primer for city children published before World War I: Todenhagen, Trautwein; Neue Fibel für Stadtkinder, 1914.



One of the early proponents of the method, the Leipzig primary school teacher Arno Fuchs, recommended in a textbook that object teaching of the city should start with some kind of a creative overview. This was represented by a balloon voyage over the cityscape described in his textbook. Thereafter the pupils should become acquainted with the details and the teacher accompanies them and point out important connections and dependencies. The city offered a multitude of concrete examples that could be used for schooling: For example concerning the natural sciences, in the city one could find the steam engine, electricity, the telegraph, magnetism – everything which provided for and supported the city. The only “pedagogical” approach that Fuchs expressly discouraged was to take the subway with the school children. The experience had no didactic advantages, he wrote, when the understanding of the environment was fragmented and without a holistic experience (Fuchs 1906, p. 3 &17).

Picture 2. From a book in object teaching directed to city children: Silex; Anschauungsunterricht für Stadtkinder, 1910.

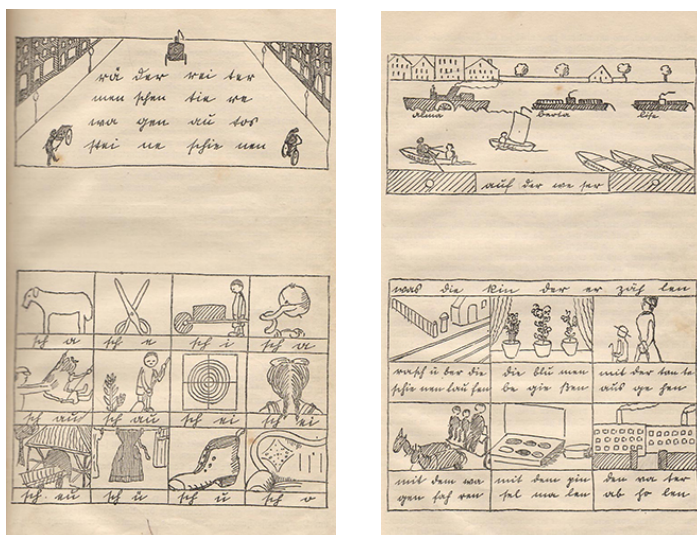
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To successors of metropolitan pedagogy local history gained a new importance. Other reformers dismissed local history as a simple way of introducing fantastic elements and romanticism into teaching. But for the metropolitan pedagogy it was more important to inaugurate knowledge and competence for contemporary demands, than to explore the distant past. Consequently, *local history in the city was urban science*, since the

modern city had become *Heimat* for generations of citizens.

Picture 3. The traditional German “Fibel” was both a tool for the alphabetization process and an instrument for socialisation. Fritz Gansberg’s *Das kann ich auch* (“I can do that too”), 1913.



The metropolitan educators believed that urbanisation had impact even on the most delicate processes of learning – that of learning to read and write. The textbooks produced by metropolitan educators like Fritz Gansberg, Arno Fuchs, Heinrich Scharrelman and others aimed at changing practice, and the study material they produced addressed other teachers who had difficulties accepting the dominating curriculum of the urban primary schools. The metropolitan educators believed that urbanisation had impact even on the most delicate processes of learning – that of learning to read and write. They took interest in the teaching methods of how to learn to read and write did not consider themselves teaching an “ability” or a “skill” – what they aimed at was to teach a *cultural technique* dependent on the social and environmental context.



The “Fibel”, the traditional German primer, had a double function: it was a tool for the alphabetization process, but also an instrument for socialisation. Hence, the primer combined the education of a cultural technique with the representation of a world image. The simple illustration also carried values and categorisations of society. The illustrations and pictures were integrated parts of a didactical concept.

The primers produced specifically for urban children in the early twentieth century consciously rearranged the didactical linkage between illustrations and words, which previously often was set in a preindustrial picture-world of rural stability. Additionally, the metropolitan reformers demanded activity and engagement of in the teaching situation. During the first school-years the pupils had a mission of composing their own primers, using every-day observations and occurrences and snap-shots of their life.

When the child was writing, it was important that the reality was not overshadowed by the act of writing. Gansberg and others with him saw writing as a *social activity*. To imitate famous writers or adapting a literary style was completely wrong. In the textbooks fairytales and fantasy had no place. Instead all attention should be devoted to tell realistic situations.

The child, one of the textbook authors reflected, should out of the unattached, sweeping urban gaze learn to create connections and understand causes: “...contemporary circumstances promote a quick and judging character and the teacher must therefore enhance independence – since we demand it from our children” (Silex, 1910, p 2ff.). The child’s natural affection for “observing” the surroundings had to be treated as an essential part of the knowledge formation in urban schools. It was a necessary gathering of “raw material” for the experience of the city children.

The instruction of literacy and language that the progressive urban reformers undertook aimed at developing a storyography for city children, dealing with “places worth telling about” (Gleim, 1985, p. 249). Places children knew of but that was not occupied or captured by the school institutions or the text world of the school and its didactical arrangements. The metropolis was a workshop for essay writing – a world of new objects and spaces and relationships. And all had to be

given names and thereby making it possible for children to “claim” their local environment through a cognitive process (Gansberg, 1911).

Picture 4. Illustrations and reading exercises from Todenhagen, Trautwein, *Neue Fibel für Stadtkinder*, 1914.

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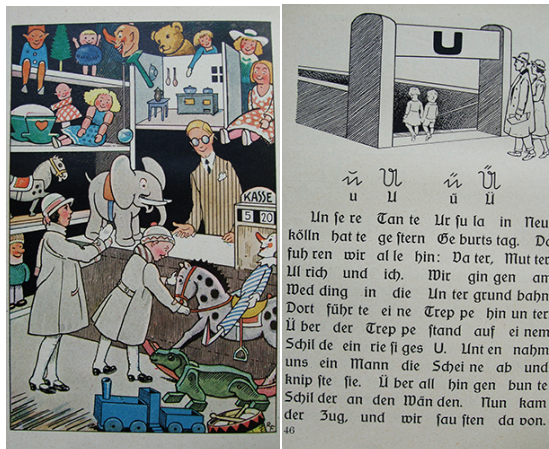


The didactic experiment Gansberg conducted aimed at training the literacy of the pupils, their ability to use reading and writing in every-day relations, and with the help of language to solve social situations. The every-day oriented, practical reading and writing had very little to do with the too literary and alienating textual constructions that dominated the school-world. As society, and not least the world of the children, went through rapid transformations, every kind of educational formalism in the process of building knowledge and experience, had a segregating effect and created distance. For metropolitan educators, visions of an equal, just society went through this delicate process of seeing, valuing and reformulating the outside world.

During the Weimar Republic in Germany, several of the intensions and pedagogical suggestions given by the metropolitan educators became widespread in primary schools in urban regions. The practices

of local history became less bounded to traditional methods and the primers appeared in different editions depending on the social, cultural and economic environment and context of the children.

Picture 5. From the Berliner Fibel, 1926, special edition for Groß-Berlin



Primary school teachers in Berlin established a working group for "practical education" in the 1920s in which one of the tasks was to produce a "Berliner Fibel" that not only offered a technique for learning to read and write, but that also was a book for young adults' and childrens language development. This Berliner Fibel would in words and pictures create close contact with the observations and feelings of 6-9 year-old city children. In the overview of the Berlin school system ten years after the Weimar Constitution the Berlin Teachers' Association proudly presented the active city learning model as a key reason for the return of many families to the public school that previously had chosen private schools after resistance and hesitation towards the modified comprehensive school system of the Weimar Republic. Parents initial distrust of the "new-fashioned kindergarten" and the pursuit of social equality had come to naught, according to the Teachers' Association, and the new shape of the elementary school was not only more suited to their needs, but also resulted in better school performance (Nydahl, 1928, p. 39).

### The Urban Conduct

During the beginning of the twentieth century, the *Großstadt* had emerged not only as tangible reality, but also as an action concept. The *Großstadt* legitimised social reforms and the professionalization of certain key institutions and functions of society, such as the, health, infrastructure, municipal services, school education, architecture and urban design. This reform focused revitalization of urban communities throughout the Western world led to an increasingly high valuation of knowledge as hard currency in a competitive urban world. Various sections of the population must now be able to share the same knowledge. This was, according to a reformer like Johannes Tews, the most important aspect of the social process of democratization: the population was not as in previous phases of urban development on completely different levels of education and specialization (Tews 1900, p. 4f).

In this second part of the article, I will focus on the visions of societal change, social equality and democratic ideals that, according to the advocates of metropolitan pedagogy, was supposed to be the outcome of school reforms and progressiveness. For metropolitan educators urbanization was a kind of *training that the whole society had to go through*. Any distinctions between education institutions and society were difficult to draw. Rather, there were opportunities for society to evolve and take new shapes by integrating the social and economic environment of the big city in the learning process and knowledge aspirations of younger generations. How could the school better equip the youth for the social and economic demands of the day? What knowledge was required of young people for them to orient themselves in the urban environment? But the discrepancy between school and society was painfully obvious all over Western Europe well into the interwar period. In an appeal for new forms of teaching in urban schools in the United States the American sociologist Joseph K. Hart, wrote that true learning itself had escaped from contemporary education:

We all live in a too intellectual world, today, a world of mere knowledge. (...) We *know* so much more than we can *do*. We are

over-intellectualized in our city life, today. But we are not *educated*. We are flabby in our wills, and our knowledge makes us, not wise, but cynical. (...) We have succeeded in devitalizing the child's world, in the city, by taking away from him his chance for actual work and play (...). (Hart, 1912, p. 102&104).

It was a recurring sense that "training" had a much wider scale and that the enhanced knowledge was no longer limited to a specific sector or a task, but formed an integral part of citizenship. In Vienna, wrote a teacher about the same time that the main educational challenge was to create a school that met the needs of contemporary urban youth, a school beyond the study of textbooks and learning by heart: "The concept of the school in our contemporary meaning is obsolete. The school must become an institution where not only teaching is conducted, but it must become a centre and home for all young people in the big city, an organisation where the youth of today can find everything they need to develop spiritually and physically" (Maurenbrecher, 1914, p. 8). The impulses of a different valuation of knowledge and a different "world view" simply had to come from outside the school, and the school was forced to completely open up towards the surrounding community in order not to entirely lose confidence.

Thoughts about democracy and modern city life were about to find its different, but related formulations in several places during the period. In New York, the Bronx teacher Angelo Patri sketched in his autobiographical a will to change the default setting of the school's mission: to work with urban youth and to start searching for bearing components for the big city as a democratic environment. In the 1910s Patri worked with the overcrowded classes with children from poor immigrant families. During his first teacher time, he looked for inspiration and renewal that could lead the work forward, but he did not come across anything but "dead, mechanical repetition with no doubt and no questions asked." An older teacher gave him Dewey's study "Ethical Principles Underlying Education" (1897) which turned out to be an awakening. In the article the word "conduct" was central and Patri reflected in his autobiography upon how people behaved, and that conduct was an in-depth measure of competence in a context-

-saturated environment such as the ethnically and culturally diverse Bronx:

The conduct was the real test of learning and culture. (...) The conduct was the key to see if the child had genuine social interests, intelligence and power. Conduct was action. Teaching was a failure. Conduct meant individual freedom. Teaching meant submission (Patri, 1917, p. ix- 7)

The knowledge that the urban school should devote itself to convey, according to Patri, was the one that could immediately be used and the one whose value was measured based on the applicability to young people's needs. Dewey himself had not drawn such sharp conclusions about the actual teaching in urban schools. But he stressed the democratic and progressive mission of the primary school at a time when society was "under constant change and tremendous development." In a central section Dewey mentioned the same striving as the metropolitan educators for the urban school to give the child tools to take control of its own existence, a process that in turn could lead to a reintegration into the community:

It is an absolute impossibility to educate the child for any fixed station in life. So far as education is conducted unconsciously or consciously on this basis, it results in fitting the future citizen for no station in life, but makes him a drone, a hanger-on (...). Here, too, the ethical responsibility of the school on the social side must be interpreted in the broadest and freest spirit; it is equivalent to that training of the child which will give him such possession for himself that he may take charge of himself; may not only adapt himself to the changes which are going on, but have power to shape and direct those changes (Dewey, 1897, p. 59f).

### **The Challenges of Urban Society on the Child**

Johannes Tews series of lectures on urban education, which he held for adult students at Humboldt Academy in Berlin in 1910 and published the following year, wanted to collect, present practical approaches and look for the social and cognitive motives for an educational renewal

look for the social and cognitive motives for an educational renewal which considered both the didactic and the social reformation on equal measures.

Tews was originally an elementary school teacher in Berlin and at the time of the lecture series, a prominent personality in the German Teachers Association. Politically, he was left with clear liberal egalitarian ideals. He advocated a meritocratic school and wanted to eliminate all forms of privileges, stratification and sour cream in the basic educational institutions. Shortly after World War I, he would make himself known as one of the leading proponents of a national unity schools and negotiator for the new Education Act during the Weimar Republic.

Like other urban educators, he was not primarily a system builder, but a practitioner. In the introduction to the lecture series, he pointed to himself on what kind of efforts he had helped to foster in Berlin when it came to education issues for young people: the creation of a quality board for the assessment of youth literature, the expansion and betterment of public libraries and the founding of the first public reading room in the city. Similar work to establish or expand urban institutions into places for knowledge transfer took place under the guidance of the social politician Walther Classen in Hamburg at the same time.

Tews was of the opinion that the city schools had to go their own way. It was about education and training in a much broader sense, also involving the family, society's institutional development, professional associations and political participation. He saw himself explicitly as a follower of Pestalozzi who had noticed how the social circumstances and the pure instruction issues were closely interdependent. The school must find a way to integrate all the knowledge and the forms of union that existed outside the school world. Above all, the big city was a youth environment. City and youth belonged together because they represented what was new and growing. Both contained something unique that demanded recognition. They could not, however, during their formative periods, expect to be tested objectively and fairly assessed.

But we who live and work in the city can not remain indifferent

or pessimistic about the prevailing conditions. We must raise awareness of the city all the benefits - would not the sacrifices we make to be worth anything (Tews, 1911, p. 2).

From Tews' corpus of thinking and writing I will stress two challenges that pedagogy and the school system faced in a time of urbanization and rapid changes of collective mentality. The first concerned the altered role of the individual in society and community. The second was the observation that the modern city has proven itself as social and geographical entity characterized by knowledge inflation.

Society and the individual in the modern city had entered into a new relationship with one other. In fact, the process of individualisation took place, according to Tews, "almost automatically" in the metropolis. But, as the social competence increased, so did the anonymity. It was therefore necessary to tie the inescapable process of individualisation to a socio-pedagogical thinking that affirmed the differentiation of society in a responsible way. If the city was not to promote isolated, competitive and egoistic citizens, the following conditions would have to be met: a socialisation in the environment, an extended knowledge of the mutual dependence and the internal togetherness of society, as well as an understanding of the functions and preconditions of the urban environment. In the accelerating economic and cultural competition, which the metropolis promoted, it became all the more important for different groups in society to share the same knowledge. In the old school system, "work" and "education" mutually excluded one another. Consequently, for a long time, work was not integrated into the world of education. But the urban world, as Tews stressed, demanded in its broadest sense a *working* population, which was in good shape both mentally and physically. He referred to the official investigation made at the docks in Hamburg, where it was shown that the uneducated workers in the storehouses were primarily newly arrived immigrants from the countryside. No modern city, Tews concluded, could, in his days, afford to produce an unschooled labour force.

The second challenge was that the city had become a place of "knowledge inflation". Urban society evolved in a direction that was not beneficial to deeper learning and tradition-laden occupations, but



favourable to individuals who were pragmatic and able to rapidly adapt. One could never cease going back to school, Tews concluded. This was true both for pupils and for teachers. Frequent renewal of knowledge worked as an antidote to the negative effects of occupational specialisation and fragmented reality. At the same time, Tews knew that new knowledge could also be acquired outside of the school, perhaps even knowledge better suited for the realities of everyday life. The city undermined the position of the school as the only institution for learning and developing. Public libraries, political associations, popular lecture series in natural science, and the museums – everywhere the school had to compete with other educational arrangements that provided a world view or orientation in contemporary society even more readily.

The competition for education was of course also a struggle over the youth; their interests, natural engagement, and their ability and willingness to organize. Tews had no doubts about the outcome of this struggle: “Social Democracy,” he wrote, “will increase its impact over the young generation if only because they have found the attractive forms of sport, leisure and popular discussion.” One should not fear this development. The urban child received nonetheless a “sharper intellectual character” which made it not only possible but desirable for the school to take a step back in order to promote other forms of educational arrangements.

The conclusion of what Tews said during the lectures at the Humboldt Academy was in fact revolutionary: as an institution for *real learning*, the school was useless and should be abolished! The task of the school ought instead be that of a mediator between crossing and diverting movements of education. The school should help to sort out, correct and make comprehensible the vast information that circulated in the city, and protect the young generation from having “diverse abnormal, upsetting and extraordinary facts” stuck in their memory. Metropolitan pedagogy, Tews continued, has shown that the school must produce applicable knowledge, and not just theoretical and intellectual cargo. Tews was well aware of the dangers in promoting ability of orientation over a seemingly timeless corpus of knowledge. There was obviously a risk that shallow and socially conditioned talents, rather than real knowledge and ambition to reach unique

insights, would be rewarded, and he admitted:

The metropolis is not especially adapted for pedagogy. It speaks with a loud voice that drowns the mild conversation of learning. The urban environment is directed towards the creative, the industrious and the political (*Ibid.*, p. 126).

It was therefore crucial to create a “teaching community” where the school could be tightly interwoven with the family.

### **Summary and Outlook**

The metropolis, die *Großstadt*, was a symbolic domain in various aspects in early twentieth century Germany. For metropolitan pedagogy, the city was a tool to challenge and break up an out-dated educational institution, to acknowledge the new situation for children and young people and to change the perception of knowledge and learning. The city as a reform concept included consequently aspirations of teachers' professionalization, the need to raise public school status and desire to win recognition for the progressive pedagogical science. The modern metropolis was regarded as an arena where the official education system, alternative self-improvement and every-day informal information exchange could work in parallel with and fertilize each other.

The state, as defender of the old education system, was still clearly defined as the opponent of the wide reformist movement. Metropolitan pedagogy was dependent on the both suppressive and permeable political system of the *Kaiserzeit*. During the 1920s, this antagonism was dissolved. Pedagogy became an academic subject and metropolitan pedagogy dissolved into a variety of voices debating adolescent, education and urban living conditions, without explicitly being part of an avant-garde pedagogical practice anymore. (Johannes Tews published his lectures again in 1921, but this time under the title *Großstadterziehung: die Großstadt als Jugenderziehungs- und Jugendbildungsstätte*).

Much of the debates of the relationship between childhood, adolescence, education, knowledge and urban growth during the

Weimar period had its origin and its ideological base in the reform movement before 1914. The necessary relationship between education and democratic reforms was recurrently emphasized. In autumn 1927 the group "Entschiedene Schulreformer" held lecture and discussion series on the theme - *Großstadt und Erziehung* that showed a broad thematic and scientific programme of the need to integrate and formalize city schools in social planning and an interventionist market order (Oestreich, P & Hoepner, W, 1927). Social changes that had occurred during the period after World War I made it increasingly futile to try to chisel out a definition of the big city, let alone to seek exploit its special character in relation to other forms of society, the urban was no longer a place but a process, a set of relationships that seized the ever expanding society and engraved all forms of human organization and conception of social, political and economic development.

During the 1920s, the "city" as a social system received another meaning and problem definition, and hence also different kinds of solution proposals. Education and psychology - but also sociology - emerged as crisis topics during the interwar period. The increasing role of planning and zoning of urban areas had begun to take educational and school issues as integrated goals for regulated suburbanization and incorporation processes. Above all, it was clear how the earlier reactive solution to the big city problems had been more of an ad hoc-character. The broad discussion about environment for upbringing and teaching of children and young people became specialized and sector specific and promoted a professional approach to reforms.

The turn towards state intervention and legislative tools to create transparent and rationalized city and school environments could be illustratively be noted in the involvement of functionalistic architects, such as Martin Wagner and Bruno Taut, in the planning of school buildings and school environments in Berlin during the 1920s (Wagner, M, 1927). A prerequisite for shaping the city and the basic institutions of society meant in Wagner and Taut's view a complete public control over urban land and building capital. It would provide opportunities to build schoolhouses in a different way than had previously been the case and to return to the ideal of the independent school buildings that were not in competition with private speculators. The institutions of education were not to be exposed but isolated from a destructive

interference and harmful impacts of other activities.

A common, and somewhat general characterization of the development during the first decades of the twentieth century, is that the city, seen as a spatial arrangement of societal conditions, was never the goal but foremost the means of social organization. Like other institutions that rests on human capital and a cultural glue between economic performance and social care, urban transformation must persistently involve *pedagogy* in the broadest sense: new learning, change of perspectives and reassessment.

In this article I have tried to exemplify my line of argumentation: the impact of urban change profoundly alters the educational system in certain formative time-periods since the city, as a social system, is pivotal for the understanding of society's basic functions. Urban development from time to time calls for a "reprogramming" of the essential code and structures that previously arranged social relations and economic growth. There is even possible to trace this change of the cognitive landscape down to textbooks and primers.

I have pointed out some of the motives within a group of progressive, but avant-garde, educator for didactical changes of promoting literacy: the enhancement of independence, individual awareness and flexibility. These abilities were all interpreted in the light of urbanisation and the maturing urban society as basic social tools for the individual to function in a new societal order. Urbanisation was like a training that the whole society had to undertake. Metropolitan educators regarded it therefore as problematic to draw any definite lines between institutions of education and society. There existed instead possibilities for society to develop and take on new features and relationships if the urban social environment was integrated in the learning process of the younger generations.

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