

Learn to Act for an Engaged Everyday Life

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Our neoliberal capitalist times are marked by a crisis of reproduction not only of production, as the very basis on which things and life are produced is now under threat.¹ We are convinced that many citizens like us would like to become active with this essential reproductive work, and determine themselves the changes they want to see.

What is this learning that gives us agency to cope, resist and change current conditions? How can we 'make other worlds possible' from wherever we are and whatever our position: as practitioners, activists, artists, researchers, students and ordinary citizens? How do we prepare ourselves for this sustained reproductive work, both at a local and global scale?

At a time when most of us feel and fear a global political and environmental crisis, we argue for the necessity of learning to act.

Learning as 'the Practice of Freedom'

The Eco Nomadic School emerged from the collective motivation of a number of people, and quickly gained a political dimension based on the conviction that pedagogy and education do not exist solely in schools and in institutions, but also within the civic realm: in activist initiatives; through political struggles; through economic undertakings; and, ultimately, in everyday life.

The school is 'education as the practice of freedom', to borrow Freire's famous formula.² It expands the realm of education to forms and formats that do not exist within current institutions, being based on what I would term a radical inclusivity. No one is excluded. The only condition is being prepared to learn and to teach actively and immediately useful things, which will improve one's own life, and at the same time, the life of the planet.

Together with feminist theorists such as Nancy Hartsock,³ or Donna Haraway,⁴ we at the Eco Nomadic School state that knowledge is socially constructed, and it is therefore 'situated' and affected by the social position of the producer. This approach to education, which starts at the level of

1 Petrescu D, Trogal K. (eds) (forthcoming 2017), *The Social Reproduction of Architecture* (London: Routledge)
2 Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London: Continuum.
3 Hartsock, N (1998). *The feminist standpoint*

revisited and other essays. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press

4 Haraway, D (1988) *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the privilege of partial perspective in Feminist studies* Vol13 (3), pp 575-599

everyday life, challenges the dominant viewpoint, and provides 'partial visions' which are subjective, embodied and diverse. The Eco Nomadic School aims to contribute to these partial visions, allowing, through its diverse curricula, a continual 'mobile positioning' of civic researchers.⁵ This 'roaming eye' embedded in the field gives a better and more exact picture of reality than other, more generalist visions.

Learning as Commoning

The Eco Nomadic School has an open politics of knowledge, which valorises knowledge exchange from different sources and across sectors and locations.⁶ Learning to act for a better world is learning with actions, people, and landscapes, all at the same time; it is an attempt to consider education as a commons.

Commons are at the heart of the discussion on democracy. The thinkers of the commons have stressed the urgent necessity today for both reclaiming existing commons and reinventing new ones. This undertaking needs time and space for sharing, and new institutions and agents who can guide and frame this process: it needs continual and sustained 'commoning'.

The actors of the Eco Nomadic School understand the diversity of everyday knowledge as both an existing and reinvented commons. Civic education, in this respect, is a commoning process which includes the maintenance and reproduction of this everyday knowledge across locations and cultures.

Diverse Pedagogies

The economic geographer Katherine Gibson, a great friend of Eco Nomadic School, has coined the term 'diverse economies' to speak about the numerous projects of economic autonomy and experimentation that are proliferating across the world. To explain this, Katherine shows the drawing of an iceberg, whose small visible top represents the capitalist economy as we know it, and whose huge invisible mass represents the 'other' economies, including those economies that sustain life for a majority of the global population, hidden out of sight.

In an analogical manner, we can call these pedagogies 'diverse pedagogies' to emphasize their heterogeneous and inclusive nature, which spans a vast range of different types of learning: from scholarly to informal education, from academic institutions to rural and suburban communities,

5 See previous footnote.

6 J.K. Gibson-Graham (2008), *Diverse Economies: Performative Practices for 'Other Worlds' in Progress in Human Geography 2008 32 (5)* pp. 613-63

from elderly to youth and vice-versa. This nomadic school, without fixed location and affiliation, thus allows a diversity of knowledges and know-hows to circulate, without hierarchy between participants and in diverse formats.

Just like the 'diverse economies', diverse pedagogies sit underneath the small, visible part of education hosted in specialized capitalist institutions. They can be found at grassroots level, dealing directly with knowledge connected to everyday life and communal living.

Learning as Agency

The Eco Nomadic School is a 'relational' project which connects communities and therefore their desires and ambition and joys: but it is about much more than being social. The school, and taking part in the school, is a political act, which promotes civic responsibility on a local and trans-local level. Learning as part of the school is a form of empowerment for existing groups to start (and continue) diverse practices, where social, ecological and economical concerns meet and merge. *Learning to Act* is ultimately about how to gain agency.

Eco Nomadic School's learning outcomes were immediately useful to inform and increase the 'capability to act' of each participant. This is a reframing of Amartya Sen's 'capabilities' approach to development in the context of education.⁷ Sen's approach shifts the focus from economic growth to a more holistic, freedom-based idea of human development, in which engaged groups and communities have a role to play towards collective emancipation and greater resilience. At a moment when resilience has become an imperative across the globe,⁸ The Eco Nomadic School with its citizen driven pedagogy, prepares the grounds for such a resilient transformation.

Transversality

The beauty of European programmes such as Grundtvig or Erasmus⁹ is that they allow 'transversal' encounters. Encountering 'the other' in his/her own context and engaging productively with her/him was an important goal for the Eco Nomadic School.

Transversality here refers to a method of organizing learning across strata: a learning which is neither hierarchical (vertical) nor symptomatic (horizontal), but generates unexpected and continually evolving situations and encounters. Guattari has introduced the concept of 'transversality' to speak about resilient subjectivity in

7 Sen, A (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

8 Lewis, M., & Conaty, P. (2012). *The resilience imperative: Cooperative transitions to a steady-state economy*. Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers.

9 Both historic figures and scholars with a fundamental social critique who promoted at the time radical ideas and pedagogy. EU programmes often tend to be named in this noble way.

the context of capitalist regimes. 'Transversality' for him is related to the subject's capacity to engender a new existential territory and to be transported beyond it.¹⁰

'Transversality' was experienced by each of the Eco Nomadic School's subjects who opened up their own 'existential territories' to others and transformed this experience into a learning experience. Participants in the Brezoi workshop thus learned not only about how to shear sheep but also about life and subsistence economies in the mountains.

Communities of Practice

The Eco Nomadic School could be also understood through Wenger's notion of 'communities of practice', as an informal learning network that developed through informal groupings drawn together by common challenges, opportunities or passions.¹¹

These knowledge communities functioned by bringing groups together to share previous experiences from different contexts, thus leading to much more effective problem solving. For many, it was the first time they acted as co-investigators in this way. A good example is provided by the community of fermentation practices that grew within the Eco Nomadic School, with people from Brezoi, Amsterdam, Colombes and Höfen all sharing their own version of the simple schnapps. Likewise, there has developed a community of gardeners, a community of wood builders, a community of husbandry and household economies within the school.

There is also a community of artists, activists, cultural workers, designers, feminists, curators, all drawing on their own peer-to-peer learning networks, and the non-hierarchical practices they've created in their own work (such as Live Projects at Sheffield School of Architecture). Here, learning became learning from and with others through pedagogies based on 'ethics, democracy and civic courage'.¹²

These are times of responsibility and care, times of reinvention and change, times when everyone's skills, knowledge and affective power are the most valuable and when learning to act should indeed be on everyone's agenda.

10 Guattari, F. (2016) *Psychoanalysis and Transversality, Texts and Interviews 1955–1971* Cambridge : MIT Press

11 Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

12 See previous footnote.