

Education and Democracy: The Third Way in Karl Mannheim

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Abstract

It is the traumatic events that break the harmony of the world and cause an abrupt turn that devastates all areas of society. Of these, the crisis of democracy and education is one of the harshest: the ability of an individual to actively participate in improving his life and society is in jeopardy.

Is there a way forward to build a democratic society? What are the most appropriate methods? What are the main factors that drive this process? These are the questions that K. Mannheim had formulated while witnessing devastating events of his time, and that led him to talk about reconstruction and a new form of democracy, the only form of government capable of putting the individual and the exercise of responsible freedom at the centre (Cesareo & Vaccarini 2009). Mannheim thought it was possible to drive this kind of democratic process through a. democratic planification, which fosters the human development and the participation of all but that, at the same time, guarantees people's freedom, equality, and dignity; b. democratic education, which represents the main driving factor of this process, capable to form a "new man" which knows *how to live* in society.

The main objective of the essay, is to analyze on a theoretical level Mannheim's proposal for democracy, highlighting especially the possibility of democratic planning and the importance of education for democracy, describing the steps beyond Mannheim's analysis. The author thus helps us to understand our Europe today, the problems that afflict it and the possible solutions that contemporary scholars are trying to offer.

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1. Introduction: Karl Mannheim, an European sociologist of knowledge and education

‘Figuratively speaking, one can say that building a society that is changing is like changing the wheels on a moving train, rather than rebuilding a house on a new foundation’. So wrote Karl Mannheim in ‘Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction’ (1972, p. 23) to explain how change within society was difficult and never linear. Similarly, more than a century later, we can say that our society is running even faster and more frantically, sometimes without knowing where to go. Thus, if you do not arrive in time, it is also possible that you may get caught in the wheels of this train that is so fast.

Karl Mannheim, a Hungarian sociologist, was one of the first scholars who devoted himself to *Wissenssoziologie* (sociology of knowledge) and oriented his cultural and scholarly interests towards a series of research that, although connected to the problems of the social conditioning of knowledge, invested in new areas: sociological, psychological, anthropological, educational, problems of mass control and techniques, and political and governance issues. All these interests led the Author to study phenomena in their complexity: only in-depth analysis of the origins of frenetic change can lead appropriate solutions. Only knowledge can lead to *salvation*. Such a process - discussed in the second paragraph - cannot be separated from the relationships that characterize an event: past and present thoughts and actions, planning and freedom, and education and development of a society. Mannheim was clear about the role that the sociology of knowledge and education could and should play as the ‘organ of human development’ (Gruning & Santambrogio, 2020, p. 15) and its ability to show the connection between all social positions and disciplines. The Hungarian sociologist did not talk about *relativism* but about *relationalism* in terms of relationship between human and thoughts. In this sense, sociology assumes two fundamental roles: 1. as a specific discipline with a distinctive object; 2. as a method that can be used for all sciences of spirit. In this second perspective, it becomes sociology of knowledge since it looks at objects with a sociological glass and as a *social objects*, unlike other disciplines that look at them as a mere objects. In particular, Karl Mannheim emphasized the essentiality of this knowledge and democratic education for the renewal of the society and the construction of planned *Third Way*: he talked about democratic education, democratic personality, and democratic behavior. Only such a process and type of education system will form free human beings - a cardinal principle of democracy -, will shape new society based on all human dignity, and will construct a world than can resist to time and crisis.

A child of many historical delusions of his era, Mannheim was convinced that only concerted action by social institutions (family, school, target groups,

and so on) could foster such education and shape a democratic but planned society that would leave no one behind: *planning for abundance*, of rights and work; *for equity*, excluding no one; *for education and democratic personality*; planning for the freedom of every human being. But is it possible to reconcile freedom with planification? Is it possible for the two dimensions to coexist? And how to plan for this freedom? Karl Mannheim said yes - as I will discuss in the third paragraph - and argued his theses in several of his most famous writings such as 'Ideology and Utopia' in 1929, 'Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction' in 1940, 'Freedom, Power and Democratic Planning' in 1950 and 'An Introduction to the Sociology of Education' in 1962.

In such a process of understanding and renewing society - discussed in the fourth paragraph - it is necessary to understand the values and the educational pattern that the societies foster. "Every society promotes an ideal model of the self and, in this direction, it orients its educational choices and strategies" (Gili, 2017, p. VI). Studying a phenomenon from the sociology of education's point of view means analysing aims, values and methods concerning the cultural and social context in which that phenomenon occurs. It means creating an educational climate and democratizing society, even though - as the author reminds us well - barbarism can arise in the abundance of education and democracy (Mannheim & Campbell Stewart, 2017).

In all Mannheim's works we can find the influences of past experiences - the Hungarian, German, and English ones - in arriving at a future synthesis. For the author 'the task of those to whom fate has given the opportunity to live in many different countries and to identify with various points of view, has always been to consider this conflict of orientations and resolve it for themselves, in forms where differences of opinion can be diametrically opposed or reconciled in a new synthesis' (Mannheim, 1957, p. 56). Mannheim's analysis - discussed in this essay - more than a century later may result contemporary and effective since offers valuable insight into interpreting events today. Blurred boundaries resulting from globalization, homogenization and loss of identity, pluralism and multiculturalism, disintegration of civil society, crisis of democracy and education are all events with which we have to deal today. In particular, the project of a *Third Way* and a new education system capable of founding a *New Man* is still highly relevant today to analyze modern societies.

2. Past delusion, future reconstructions: know to understand

Each transformation, if not properly guided, cause multiple disorders and unsolved problems in every sphere of social life, which can be solved by paying due attention to the circumstances that have accompanied these events

(Mannheim et al., 1976). From the transformation of the historical context in which the sociologist lived, Mannheim's analysis and work came to life. It is an analysis of a dramatic time in which the themes of his study also become political and civic engagement (Izzo, 1974) visible especially in the last writings of his life. Already in Germany, when he wrote 'Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction', the Author understood that he lived in an age of profound transformation and soon felt the need to equip himself with new keys to interpret reality and modernity. Based on that experience but also later, between 1933 and 1947 - when forced to leave Nazi Germany, he experienced exile in London - Mannheim witnessed a series of shocks that led him to reflect: the economic crisis of 1929, the collapse of the Wall Street stock exchange, the failure of the Weimar Republic, the criticality of totalitarianism (Santambrogio, 1990), the limits of liberalism and the fragility of the democratization process. During that exile, the Author observed the complete failure of democracy in the Weimar Republic, inadequate to solve the problems of modern mass society. He understood how under specific social conditions, rigid planning turned into restriction of freedom while lack of planning into total anarchy. In addition, the principle of *laissez-faire* was no longer suitable for keeping society in balance. All these events were causing political, social, and cultural chaos. Therefore, in his last book 'Freedom, Power and Democratic Planning', published after his death, Mannheim proposed a new way: democratic planning.

Studying events as a participant conducted Mannheim to realize that reality appears different to distinct observers that construct it from various points of view (Santambrogio, 1990). In addition, he perceived the meaning of general structural and permanent transformations of modern society: the only way to deal with such changes was to understand first the socio-historical conditions in which they occurred and then analyze possible solutions. Knowledge, then, stands as the principal tool for such analysis since there are aspects of thought that cannot be adequately understood and interpreted as long as the origins and the interrelation with other factors remain obscure. For the Author, in fact, events could only be thought in continuity with the past and people immersed in a context whose form is already known. Thus the Author wrote in 'Ideology and Utopy' (1957, p. 8): "it is certainly true that the individual thinks. There is no metaphysical entity above or below him, such as group consciousness, whose ideas the individual could, at most, reproduce. Nevertheless, it would be false to assume from this fact that an individual's ideas and feelings originate on the sole basis of his experience". The human being is, in fact, autonomous but immersed in a specific context and group: he finds at his disposal certain words and meanings, thoughts and values that already exist. The starting point of knowledge is to grasp the socio-historical conditions of a situation and to think that human beings develop a particular style of thinking and living from already

existing patterns: these are internalized and allow them to adapt to certain typical situations (Mannheim, 1957). Therefore, the sociology of knowledge can only consider existing thought and the context of action in communion since the subjects of a reference group interact and act together within that context. Mannheim understood at once that knowledge and thought are not merely individual activities nor the result of forces outside the social group. It is an historically and socially situated process interpreted from the specific position of individuals in society (Merico, 2019). These elements produce different pieces of knowledge influenced by many social groups of society: classes, work groups, schools, and generations. In particular, Mannheim thought that generation placement represents one of the sociological variables underlying the social determination of thought (Merico, 2019) and distinguishes purely biological factors from factors generated by social and cultural forces that determine an event.

Such an insight into social phenomena was essential in Mannheim's analysis: starting from considering all elements and their natural link, the author reflected on two alternative paths that history presents.

The first alternative refers to social changes: the path is marked out over a long period, and social changes are gradual and take place alongside existing social structures and institutions. These elements change slowly, and so do values, traditions and lifestyles, which have time to absorb the adjustments (Casavecchia, 2022).

The second alternative, experienced by Mannheim, refers to the *abrupt turn* characterized by accelerated and impetuous changes: unexpected challenges are faced; everyday life and social systems are disrupted and require new equilibrium. As Casavecchia (2022) writes: "social subjects - be they individuals or large institutions - need to find a new equilibrium to survive and to return to reading and interpreting the reality they face in which they perceive a disorientation because a different worldview is required of them" (p. 1). During this *abrupt change*, however, the old is not immediately replaced with the new, but there is a time of adaptation *in itinere*: it is a society in great turmoil in which major social transitions coexist with existing structures and cultural models. Reshaping institutions whenever there is a new course, "like the ancient cathedrals that man built, enlarged, and rebuilt [...], adding new aisles in the new style of the age, but never dismantling the old" (Mannheim et al., 1976, p. 25) is not always the most suitable solution, especially in case of social processes and structures. It is not enough to modify institutions inherited from the past when values and principles change just because – as Mannheim said (1976, p. 25) - "previous generations were lucky enough to change course at the right time". A deeper analysis of the changes is necessary, especially when society, previously formed by small and organic groups, becomes complex,

characterized by the multiplicity of stimuli (Jedlowsky, 1999), continuous fractures and fluidity (Bauman, 2011), and flexibility (Sennett, 2016). When it transformed into the *Great Society* as Mannheim defined it.

“Disintegration is caused by the advent of the mass society, the Great Society, the new problems being posed by industrial production and the rapid growth in the number of people in all social structures. The most obvious symptoms of disintegration are recurrent unemployment, uncertainty, moral disorientation and restlessness, i.e. the inability to find the most basic solutions to life’s problems and the very meaning of existence” (Canta, 2006, p. 46). In this accelerated and fragmented Great Society, the non-harmonious development of the various parts of the system and the inability to react promptly to changes, leads to the weakening of the structure. This also leads to social and moral disintegration, the cause of which is also the uprooting of individuals from the belonging group. In this sense, in a *restricted society*, the self-regulating abilities of small groups remain undisturbed, thought and action are controlled by the community and rules set by customs thus creating traditions. The transformation into a *Great Society*, on the contrary, has led to specific consequences: a. scarce aggregative capacity of small groups (family, school, friends) that dissolves in a mass society; b. disintegration of social controls of action, derived from the loss of stable and reliable values; c. broader management of freedom, as a consequence of the scarce attractiveness of small groups: in mass society, rules easily dissolve while freedom lives only in relation to defined rules in order to not be manipulated; d. disintegration of cooperative controls which, unlike authoritarian ones, provide for a sharing of power, leading both to creativity of action and to a common purpose; e. disintegration of individual personality, due to the loss of reference points; f. erosion of widespread consensus which in small societies is reflected in habitual and traditional models while they dissolve in larger societies. There are other consequences: new technologies, increasing bureaucratization, new techniques contributing to the transition of social structures (Casavecchia, 2022).

In this transformation, *acting concerning traditions*, as Weber would say, presents some problems: on one hand, it allows people to reduce the complexity of choices and realities (Luhmann, 1979), follows known paths, and avoids problems; on the other, customs and traditions work as long as there are certain socio-historical and cultural conditions or if these slowly change. In the case of an *abrupt and sudden turn*, old solutions may not necessarily work as a remedy for new problems. In this context, “a truly comprehensive sociological and dynamic investigation is not satisfied with inquiring into the development and transformations undergone by the predominant world conception but will also investigate the characteristics of those worldviews that have become irrelevant

[...], but which nonetheless transform themselves during their existence and survive in modified forms” (Mannheim, 2000, p. 118).

The combination of these elements and the analysis of this complex context formed the founding basis of Mannheim’s analysis: the Author identified the need for planned action oriented towards the common good and democracy, which, if not properly managed, can have harmful effects on a par with authoritarianism.

3. Understanding to plan democratically: the *Third Way* in Karl Mannheim

From these newly outlined events, Mannheim felt the need to delineate precisely theoretical and practical aspects to manage the *abrupt turns* of his time. “At the crossroads in history, we must try to reorient ourselves, consult the map and ask ourselves: where do these roads go, where do we want to go?” (Mannheim et al., 1976, p. 26). Sometimes history presents itself as linear, but other times an *abrupt turn* takes place, and it is at these moments that knowledge, education and planning¹ can help to manage the situation in the best way possible. Recognizing change means recognizing a dynamic approach to reality and society that is constantly transforming.

Mannheim carefully observed the solution proposed during the upheavals of his time, Fascism and Communism (the *First Ways*) and *Laissez-faire* liberalism (the *Second Way*), analyzing their critical issues and offering an alternative: the *Third Way*. However, the two totalitarianism are not the same thing. The Author observed that Fascism presents itself as a strong ideology that believes in the unlimited exploitation of resources and opportunities, conceives war as inherent in human nature and as a characteristic of its race that takes advantage of it to produce stronger soldiers. The fascist uses the technique of ruthless propaganda as the basis of human relations and makes it the highlight of education. Although humankind has fought against forms of command and oppression (Mannheim et al., 1976), fascism thinks that human beings want to be guided and makes this guidance a principle of political and social organization. In this context, human beings experience continuous depersonalization, a lack of self-expression and freedom: fascism does not believe in human creativity. At the same time, the Author noted that where fascism lacks something, Communism was plenty: such ideology started from the perfectibility of human beings and the social order. It was always ready to

¹ The term *planification* is related to the historical context in which Mannheim lived. Today, we can talk about programming.

claim rights through Revolution, to destroy everything and start anew; only through violence the Communists thought that society could change (Mannheim, 1972). Contextual factors that foster Mannheim's analysis were the advent of modernity and its increasing complexity and difficulty: a mass society is always in danger, as is peace, and one cannot move forward except by planning and educating (Canta, 2006). This is especially true in modern societies, within which the theory of democracy is in a pitiful state, "it certainly has not kept pace with the most significant transformations that have occurred in political practice in recent years" (Schmitter, Zompanti, 1983, p. 386). Especially in Western countries, democracies, after defeating the antidemocratic forces of I and II World War, no longer felt the need to critically analyze their political practices: whatever they did was considered democratic only because it arose in a context legitimized as democratic. Such behavior allowed democratic theory to survive since it sought to justify *a posteriori* why a structure should be considered so. Every structure and process within a society must be analyzed in depth, even considering those changes and transformations that seem indirectly related. These changes "should not be considered democratic just because they seem to have been created and agreed upon by consensus, nor on the other hand should they be seen only as temporary deviations, destined to disappear in a short time because of the opposition of democratic forces" (Schmitter, Zompanti, 1983, pp. 386-387).

From such reflection and complex scenery, Mannheim understood that the old recipes adopted during the era of absolutism, the liberal state and in the third stage with the advent of unitary communities were no longer adequate to solve new imbalances. In this case, there are two alternatives: retracing old paths of absolutism or providing for the planning of freedom that does not necessarily dismantle old institutions but transforms them into more effective instruments. Mannheim, therefore, understood the need to consider power within democratic society by envisaging its organization: it assumes a central role in the realization of a democratic society and requires extensive interdisciplinarity (i.e. political sociology, social psychology, educational policy, anthropology).

Such planning, however, must be of a particular kind, which is why Mannheim gave us the blueprint for democratic 'planning' and summarized its basic principles in detail: *planning for freedom*, democratically controlled; *planning for abundance*, for full use of resources and not favoring group monopolies; *planning for a society that does not abolish classes* but abolishes poverty; *planning for social justice*, respecting diversity and not flattening them; *planning for specific cultural standards*, but not discarding tradition; *planning that neutralizes the dangers of a mass society*, not coordinating the means of social control but intervening appropriately only in cases of deteriorating social structures; *planning for balance*, favoring centralization but at the same time empowering the people; *planning but*

not regimentation, so that the free expression and creativity of each person survives (Mannheim et al., 1976).

The author proposed a path that proceeds by peaceful reforms and changes, by stages, trials, adjustments and errors, by constant analysis and planning, in a continuous dialectic: just as at the time when Mannheim was writing nothing was certain, so too today everything is fluid, and nothing remains as it is for long. The debate about the best possible methods to deal with abrupt turns remains an ever-open flexible discussion. Within this context, Mannheim's sociology of knowledge took new form and became rational exercise of political action. Mannheim, in fact, proposed a democratic planning that provided for the coordination of all institutions of society, education, evaluation, and disciplines, and also that was implemented by politicians. To the latter, the Author ascribed the status of *Intellectuals* who will lead the necessary change and identified the most appropriate ways to compose such a group. Indeed, some problems are self-provoked by democracy and need to be solved: for example, when political democratization becomes more and more extensive, there is a risk of entrusting power to a technically and politically unskilled mass that, perhaps, does not carry forward those progressive ideas that should characterize democracy. Dictatorships succeeded over time have not demonstrated that democracy does not exist or exists in the absence of an educational system: on the contrary, the dictatorial techniques have taken root precisely in democratic contexts abundant with education, since the abundance of democracy means that more people have access to education, political life becomes fluid, and the power of a small group can become the law of all. All these elements can transform into a dictatorship. It is for this reason that democracy needs a general *democratization process* of the whole society with respect for specific principles: *the essential equality of all human beings*, as they naturally embody the principle of humanity; *the uniqueness, autonomy and unrepeatability* of the human being; and the *participation of all in the process* of understanding and designing every single field of democratic societies.

In this context the role of *Intellectuals* become essential in the educational and democratic process that underlies the *Third Way*, and their connection to education branches out along two tracks.

The first relates to the role that education plays in the formation of the class of *Intellectuals*: “the main characteristic of the latter is that it comes from ever different strata and social positions and no longer depends in its expressions on any caste organization” (Mannheim, 2000, p. 153). The educational path - which is the result of many factors - and the scientific committee of this class allows them to achieve 1. a group consciousness without, however, carrying the weight of a specific identity (Casavecchia, 2022), and 2. an aggregation between classes to transversally address the problems of

society. They find themselves in a privileged position since they constitute a group “open to the constant influence of individuals from the most diverse social classes and the most heterogeneous groups in terms of convictions and tendencies” (Mannheim, 2000, p. 158). These elements allow the *Intellectuals* to overcome party conflicts because they are relatively independent.

The second track concerns the role *Intellectuals* can assume in the diffusion of democratic education. Their educational pattern enables them to understand society’s needs and protect people’s interests; it makes them willing to tackle problems from multiple points of view and with the help of different styles of thought (Cassese, 2021). Their educational pattern also enables them to build a plural society that respects the fundamental principles of democracy: equality and dignity of every person. Notwithstanding the criticalities and limitations of this process, for the Author, the class of *Intellectuals* will be able to guide society in a democratic *Third Way* planning, and place themselves in an open perspective capable of influencing social change².

It is fundamental to understand that this process does not mean that a few *Intellectuals* and politicians have the hegemony: the Hungarian sociologist spoke of the concertation of knowledge and power that belongs to institutions and produces ordered patterns of social interactions according to norms, values and codes. Power, in this sense, does not take on a negative meaning and does not necessarily stand in antithesis with freedom and democracy. To foster the creation of a planned democratic state, the Hungarian sociologist also offered principles and virtues available to such *Intellectuals*.

Firstly, Mannheim proposed the *five principles of the politics of preventive planning* aimed at explaining the role of the State within democratic planning and thus distinguishing it from the role assumed in a totalitarian government. In the reconstruction process after I and II World War, one of the main issues was precisely to prevent the State from assuming a totalitarian and totalizing role. For these reasons, Mannheim spoke of: *strong central power* to carry out planning and to prevent the rise of internal oligarchies from subverting the order; *centralization needed to coordinate the different measures*, which in turn were essential for planning and to prevent political change from occurring only because of passing mood swings; *centralization to be used only for some fundamental political issues*, to avoid repressing people’s creativity, the foundational basis of any democratic society; *positive function of social control* through cooperation between government and community, because only some controls are needed for freedom

² Unlike Mannheim, other scholars (Gramsci, Foucault) considered Intellectuals as a closed group linked to the class they belong to, or (Bourdieu) as a class in its own right that shares a common intellectual terrain from which specific fields spring (Canta, 2006).

(Casavecchia, 2017); *state interference in economic life* to regulate arbitrary powers, avoid inequalities and protect freedom.

Secondly, Mannheim's reflection also dwelled on the *nine virtues of representative government*, which can form the basis for democratic and inclusive government, despite the fact that there are no ideal models of democracy and no single one: *integration of all social forces*, managing the opposition between the various *Vital Worlds (Lebenswelt)* present in society; *competition of ideas and democratic bargaining*, resulting from debates and agreements; *superiority of parliamentary representation over corporate representation*, to maintain territorial articulation and not representation of individual interests; *emotional identification and sense of responsibility of citizens*, who will have 'the government he deserves' thus taking responsibility for his choices; *public accountability*, in the knowledge that we are immersed in a community and that freedom has public limits; *assignment of responsibilities to the governed and the governed*; *flexible policies*, adapting to various historical moments and needs; *constructive use of opposition*, for open critical debate; and *resolution to act*, to avoid a debate that paralyzes political action and goes on too long.

So, Mannheim's proposal was an attempt to reconcile people's autonomy and balanced consensus development, based on the closeness between rulers and ruled rather than their distancing, for public and participatory planning of goals. Such proximity should be based on an awareness of equality and dignity, of sociopolitical responsibility of every citizen, and should serve to reduce inequalities, even though for a long time we have been observing a reversal of the situation: new distances weakening participation; loss of trust in intellectuals and institutions; unclear and non-transparent communication; corrosion of solidarity and lack of cooperation (Casavecchia, 2022). Even in those Western European countries where democracy is generally considered to be acquired and societies are more participated, the situation is not as optimistic as one can expect. One of the issues that have increasingly emerged over time is that different countries have scaled back their definition of the ideal of democracy "so that they conform to what we can achieve without particular effort: in fact, this feeds complacency and negates efforts to identify how democracy is weakened" (Crouch, Paternò, 2003: 5). The *Intellectuals*, in K. Mannheim's conception, should serve as the glue of society since - despite being influenced by their own socio-historical experiences - they have the cultural tools to foster a democratic development of society in all its spheres, and build that *planned and democratic Utopia* dear to the Author. Utopia for the sociologist was not, in fact, something unrealizable as it is generally understood, but rather was that right synthesis between dynamism and tradition that favored the process of growth and creativity of society. Ideology, typical of the bourgeoisie, on the contrary, was synonymous with static and conservatism, as shown in his 'Ideology and

Utopia' written in 1929. This continuous process of knowing and returning solutions necessarily presupposes the spread of a democratic culture and democratic personality through education. The author ascribed to the latter a primary and vital function and is the only one that can lead to real knowledge and equal planification.

4. Culture and democracy: the role of education

During Mannheim's English period - from 1933 to 1947, when he died - the central themes of the sociologist's work were influenced by social psychology, anthropology, and especially education (Corradini, 1984). According to the Author, the renewal of society could only take place through education for democracy: the events he witnessed led him to reflect on the fact that the increase in the complexity of society is often not followed by a readjustment of values, which for Mannheim performed the function of integration. The education Mannheim spoke of was a new system that formed new values but, above all, new people: "there can be no complete institutional transformation without the psychological and educational changes necessary to make the new system work. Social education must penetrate to ever deeper levels of the self" (Mannheim et al., 1976, p. 268). A person's identity is not already formed at birth but is the result of a synthesis between the first socialization or 'passive moment' (learning related to the family and past experiences) and the secondary socialization or 'active moment' (new knowledge and changes - Corradini, 1984; Mead, 2010).

In this sense, Mannheim talked about a new perspective of education and identities that derive from this education, different from the individualist and holistic ones. Individualist approaches consider education simply as a process of interaction between individuals as separate identities; on the contrary, holistic approaches see education as reflecting processes and changes taking place in society: in this case, it is the collective that educates and no longer the individual (Gili, 2017). Unsatisfied of these two perspectives, Mannheim proposed a third one, similar to Mead's *reciprocal social action theory*, as a synthesis between individual and collective educational action. The Author distinguished between *I-object*, that is the product of the social interaction and conditioning, the set of roles and parts that the community makes available to us, and the *I-subject*, that is the principal agent of the change, that participates to the evolution of the society. "This is what we can call *reflexive adaptation* to the environment. It is only with reference to this character of the *I-subject*, which a democratic education must cultivate and strengthen, that the notion of decision and choice emerges, since without the *I-subject* there could be no concept of responsibility, nor could

there be any hope of novelty or unexpected acquisition in experience” (Gili, 2017: VII). The educational process, consequently, will be the synthesis of these two parts: the individual acquires self-awareness when he recognizes that he is the ‘product’ of an individual and a collective upbringing. In the synthesis between the two moments, the subject must therefore acquire those critical skills - what Martha Nussbaum’s (2007; 2013) calls *critical thinking* - that leads people not to accept any argument just because the tradition but to reason critically about experiences and form own reflections. Only such a process will shape free human beings, a cardinal principle of democracy: citizens will be able to understand the world and its complexity through *critical thinking* and to give up a part of their freedom for a greater one that benefits all. *Critical thinking*, therefore, is essential to becoming good citizens in a multicultural society, enriched by the presence of people who differ in ethnicity, caste, and religion. Together with this element, there are other skills that Nussbaum calls 1. *cosmopolitan ability*, as the people’s capability to recognize themselves as part of the world and linked to other human beings by emotions and 2. *narrative imagination*, as the ability to be intelligent readers of other souls and stories. These three abilities are not the result of spontaneous development but emerge from the interaction between the subject’s own abilities and external factors typical of the context in which one lives. Among these factors, education is one of the principal facilitators of functioning, through which everyone has the opportunity to expand its space for activity and participation and express their ideas. In this sense, the *mannheimian planner* must incorporate such principles into his plan and encourage their formal and substantive compliance. Indeed, it is not enough for a principle to be enunciated but assimilated and respected.

In this context, the concept of education and social education used by Mannheim and Campbell Stewart (2017) can help to understand this educational process of synthesis since the Author defined the semantic field of educational science distinguishing between: training, instruction, teaching, education, social education. Each definition is important because “it reveals a different dimension of the social relationship we call education” (Gili, 2017, p. II).

The *training* refers to the opportunity to acquire practical knowledge, the preparation through which the individual undergoes to improve his performance, the internship required to acquire the necessary skills. The *instruction* refers only to the dimension of formal learning and *what I teach*: we are talking about the set of notions imparted and not about the relationship between teacher and pupil. The *teaching*, on the contrary, refers to *how I teach* and the relationship between educator and educated: this process presupposes reciprocity between the people involved and require a process of equal participation of the parties. The *education* designates people’s physical and

mental rearing and takes on such a broad meaning that it is often vague: it presupposes a mutual influence between two or more people, which also changes their character. “Whatever we do for ourselves and whatever is done by others for us for the express purpose of bringing us a little closer to the perfection of nature (education), it does more: in its broadest sense it includes even the indirect effects produced on human character and faculties by things whose immediate purposes are different, by systems of government, by industrial arts, by forms of social life, not only that, even by physical phenomena independent of human will, climate, nature of soil and geographical location” (Mannheim, Campbell Stewart, 2017, p. 54; Mill, 1931, p. 132). In this sense, the education differs from the others definition because it is not a descriptive concept but a normative one (Gili, 2017): it is about having to be and transforming what exists into something higher and better. It refers to an ideal personality, although it depends on the contexts, the ages, and the existing ideal of life and sociality. This concept leads directly to *social education* - modern socialization - in the sense that the principal active educational agent is society: this is the main factor around which Mannheim’s democratic reasoning revolved. This kind of education is essential in pluralistic and democratic society: various social groups with different religions, beliefs, cultural belongings, principles need to coexist in the same space and time. This process presupposes a respectful and integrated system of values. Mannheim’s democratic concept of education in a planned society arose not only from school but also from existing social institutions. It is an education that 1. flexes and adapts to social changes while maintaining central values, 2. prepares for the acceptance of democratic educational policies and also use communication tools to reach this purpose, 3. promotes the participation of both educators and educated, active agents in the process of designing educational policies. Most important is a flexible education: just as principles and values change over time, in the same way, the education must follow those changes, set its goals and find the most appropriate methodologies for achieving them. It must consider the historical conditions and their change, the cultural context, the geographical context, and many more elements. It must consider the renewal typical of all societies. Human beings, in fact, always try to react to events that affect them and transform them into energies for their further existence (Dewey, 1916). In this sense, the educational system assumes a new form and contribute to the renewal of all people: “(*the school*) is a means of getting us away from an unduly scholastic and formal notion of education. Schools are, indeed, one important method of transmission which forms the dispositions of the immature; but it is only one means, and, compared with other agencies, a relatively superficial means. Only as we have grasped the necessity of more fundamental and persistent modes of tuition can we make sure of placing the scholastic methods

in their true context” (Dewey, 1916, p. 4). Finally, it is an education that presupposes human development in all its forms, with full respect for human dignity and equality of opportunity (Sen, 2020). Many scholars (Morin, 2015; Sen, 2000) emphasize the importance of democratic education and the right to participation in society for freedom and well-being of all. “Modern education, no matter how much it gives tools for living in society, no matter how much it gives elements of a general culture, no matter how much it devotes itself to providing even vocational education, suffers precisely from the lack of educating for humanity, for knowing how to live precisely” (Ellerani, 2018, p. 1).

In Mannheim’s analysis was evident - but also in modern society - the relevance to re-invent the educational system as a generative power to build a new, inclusive, and diverse society of knowledge. We can infer from this that, for Mannheim, the first need was to establish social education with a broad meaning. The term social here refers to the entire system of values and interactions of which the individual is a part: education for citizenship, respect for others, rules and traditions, openness, and education for understanding and culture. It means, finally, a system that forms social human beings who therefore know how to live in society. Accordingly, the Author’s social education presupposed the existence of a democratic personality that arises under certain conditions and from democratic behaviour, which is its manifestation. Such behaviour, is characterized by a breadth of outlook and readiness for cooperation and solidarity, is inclined to fruitful and critical debate, and is willing to enrich one’s personality through synthesis of different positions. Thus, democratic behaviour is able to change and open to diversity. Creating a democratic personality means creating patterns of cultural interaction suitable for fostering the emergence and development of such a personality since patterns of democratic integration can be induced and are the product of the cultural environment.

We must respect specific assumptions for models of democratic integration and cultural environment to work: the potential to form free and open-minded people. The Author pointed to four essential aspects for this to happen: openness to cooperation, mutual respect, reduced use of violence, and integrative behaviour. These principles need a regeneration in society, recuperating the individuality within the collectivity: the society must keep people together, creates trust and not suspicion, cooperation and not destructive competition, but, at the same time, must considers need and desire of every single human. The scholars (Mannheim, 1957; Sen, 1993) do not talk about a flattening of the individual in favor of the collective, but a healthy individualism that is recovered and respected to enhance the equal dignity of every human being and create the conditions for respect for all (Sen, 2000).

Although the term individualism is often associated with mindlessness and selfishness, in reality, it is the political and ideal foundation of democracy and does not mean selfishness or indifference to others (Urbinati, 2011). The ‘fault’ for such an analogism can be attributed to a consumerist and capitalist logic that has been exacerbated in the 20th century and has given rise to the most tenacious obstacles to the realization of a society that is economically and socially supportive and aimed at the common good. Individualism, on the contrary, can be identified with the culture of autonomy and responsibility all of which are prerequisites for creating social integration. In this sense, Urbinati talks about transcendental integration, which thus attends to people in their specific needs and is configured as an ethical language through which to organize society and institutions. Individualism thus becomes the glue of society and the common good.

Cooperative method guarantees the confrontation of such individualisms, the sharing of choices and the empowerment of individuals in democratic society: “cooperation properly understood means the continuous integration of different purposes. An individual who has never been educated in integrative purposes will not have an experience of democratic cooperation, because the democratic essence is the integration of purposes and not mere compromise” (Mannheim, 1972, p. 287). Such a method directly involves the first dimension of democratic behavior - tolerance - considered as the ability to listen to the other and to formulate a new synthesis of various thoughts. The second dimension of democratic behavior is the model of democratic responsibility aimed at integrating subjective aspects (typical of the person) and objective aspects (typical of the environment and relationships) of the social dimension (Casavecchia, 2022). In this educational and cultural process of renewal, *Intellectuals* - as explained in the third paragraph - have a significant role: at the same time, they would guide the process of democratization and the educational process. In this guiding role they need to consider that democratic development has expanded the possibility of expression to new public, that is growing larger and larger. This is an essential point in the analysis: democracy means give more opportunities to all, but it also means that most people probably do not have the same cultural level. *Intellectuals* cannot fail to consider this: the opposite error could be that mass production could degenerate into standardization and the production of routine lowering the level of culture.

Finally, the democratic design of freedom presupposes a new subject that, motivated by strong values, imbues society with an ethical vision. Only by remaking man himself is the reconstruction of society possible. “The interpretation of man’s aspirations, the transformation of his capacities and the transformation of our moral code are not matters for edifying sermons or

visionary utopias but are vital motives for all of us, and the only question is what can reasonably be done in this dimension” (Mannheim, 1972, p. 25).

5. Conclusion: sociology of Karl Mannheim, sociology of today

Looking at Mannheim’s analysis, we can immediately realize how current and viable his proposal is. Several crises are characterizing our time: mistrust in democracy and *Intellectuals*; crisis of education that we are experiencing for a long time; immoderate economic growth; authoritarian contexts that deceptively try to appear more efficient than democratic ones whose decisions, based on free consent and social involvement, are, instead, more solid; crises of citizen participation, which are not engaged in the definition and design of public policies that, as a result, are not based on their needs; pandemic crises, including the COVID-19 one that we are still experiencing, and which have unhinged all of society’s reference points causing precisely that *abrupt turn* that Mannheim spoke of. These are all social changes and disintegrations persisting for a long time.

The dynamic and ever-open-ended perspective on change proposed by the Hungarian sociologist can help us understand such abrupt turns and prepare for possible solutions in time, even though sudden events require timeliness of decisions. *Sudden turns*, however, do not always happen by chance and often stand in continuity with earlier experiences and solution already adopted. In this sense, the first cue we can take from Mannheim is to constantly analyze the socio-historical conditions of an occurrence and make use of the experiences we have already had: only in this way could we deal with a sudden crisis more consciously and show flexibility in solidity. Mannheim had already anticipated the importance of knowledge as the only way to salvation at the time he was writing and revealed an irreplaceable truth: nothing is static, and even today, with globalization and mass society, everything is in motion, and nothing remains as it is for long. The debate about the best possible methods to deal with abrupt turns remains open even today. Creating that solidity on which flexibility rests presupposes a strong individual and collective democratic personality and behavior: here, we take the second cue suggested by Mannheim. Education for democratic personality and its concrete expression through behavior, directs us toward an educational system different from the one outlined in recent years. The modern society, in fact, calibrates the educational system to the needs of the labor market, technology, and consumption, consistent with a knowledge society that is no longer concerned with raising the quality of life of citizens and nurturing his critical thinking, but to annihilate it. Mannheim and other scholars (Gili, 2017; Nussbaum, 2007; Sen, 2000), on the

contrary, propose new system of education based on: new communication, transparent, inclusive and open to all that breaks cultural barriers and creates bridge; *cosmopolitan and narrative skills*, so as to read the emotions of others and respect their lives regardless of beliefs, ethnicities, languages; concerted action by all the cultural and educational agencies, that are still the principal tools for orientation, especially during the *abrupt turns* of history; cultural interaction, tolerance and democratic personality; human development, respect of diversity and individuality within the collectivity. Through this type of educational system, one can grasp some of the characteristics and criticalities of the times and hinge new points of reference to respond to the fragilities inherent in democracy. “The society, to survive, must be inclusive and embrace the diversity that exists within it. Ensuring fairness and democracy requires vigilance, debate, and an approach that constantly revitalizes its values while moderating its depravities. Only good politics defeats the extremists” (Fukuyama, 2022, p. 35). In his analysis, Mannheim highlighted the essential guiding role of politics in the educational and democratic process, considering them *Intellectuals*: in a world dominated by mistrust and crisis of democracy, today’s politicians should recover the old *mannheimian* sense of *Renegade Intellectuals*. For the Author, *Renegade* is that intellectual who, despite being immersed in a specific context and influenced by various elements (as everyone is), are free and manages to detach himself from those conditioning by the cultural tool he possesses. Because of this, democratic education assumes a central role within the society: only through this, promoted by a concert of instruments and institutions, these *Renegade Intellectuals* will build a democratic planned society and spread a democratic culture for all. “Democracy does not survive if citizens do not believe to be part of the same political system” (Lombardi, 2022, p. 35). Only through this new educational system that Mannheim and other scholars refer to we can build generative, planned, democratic society based on equality, tolerance and dignity of all human beings. Mannheim returned us to the project of a planned democracy based precisely on such a democratic education, political principles and virtues, bottom-up process of participation. A planned democracy achievable through a *Third way*: planned, democratic and educated.

This process presupposes new human beings ‘of action’ who deconstruct static Ideologies in favour of possible dynamic Utopias. “It is not so much the man of action who seeks the absolute and the immutable, as the one who wishes to persuade others to maintain the status quo, believing that they derive advantages and comforts from the conditions as they are. Those who are satisfied with the existing order of things have every intention of regarding that situation as eternal [...]. We are then faced with a disconcerting tendency in modern thought whereby the Absolute once used as a means of communication

with the divine, has become a tool used by those who intend to take advantage of it to distort, pervert and conceal the meaning of the present” (Mannheim, 1957, p. 95). Hence, Mannheim’s final suggestion: knowledge, culture and education are not the endpoints, but the ever-living and valid means of constructing truths, not absolute but flexible. Awareness of the structural transformations of one’s own time already constitutes the first step in overcoming them; awareness of living in a time of disintegration and crisis is the first step in identifying the most suitable therapy.

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