

## ***Deschooling for all? The thought of Ivan Illich in the era of education (and learning) for all***

***¿Desescolarización para todos? El pensamiento de Ivan Illich en la era de la educación (y el aprendizaje) para todos***

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**Abstract:** Shortly after its publication in 1971, Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society* made a significant impact on reports written at the most influential levels of international institutions, such as Edgar Faure's report for UNSECO, titled *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow* (1972). However, *Deschooling Society* is but one of many aspects in the overall set of criticisms Illich constructed regarding education and its institutions throughout his entire career. With this matter in mind, this article presents a study on the usefulness of Illich's thoughts on education and its institutions in the debate on the «post-2015 agenda» being promoted by organisations such as UNESCO and the World Bank. The aim is to reclaim this author's works as key referents in the questioning of the theoretical grounds predominating many international development policies that advocate «Education for All» and «Learning for All» in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Keywords:** Illich; deschooling; degrowth; Education for All; Learning for All.

**Resumen:** Poco tiempo después de su publicación en 1971 *La sociedad desescolarizada* de Iván Illich tuvo un impacto destacado en los informes elaborados por las instancias internacionales más influyentes. Tal es el caso del informe de Edgar Faure para la UNESCO titulado *Aprender a ser. La educación del futuro* (1972). No obstante, *La sociedad desescolarizada* apenas representa una vertiente dentro del conjunto de la crítica construida por Illich en relación a la educación y sus instituciones a lo largo de su trayectoria. Una vertiente que décadas después el propio autor calificaría de obsoleta, ingenua e incluso insuficientemente radical (desde una perspectiva teórica e historiográfica). Teniendo presente esta cuestión, en este artículo se presenta un estudio de la utilidad del pensamiento de Illich sobre la educación y sus instituciones en el debate en relación a la «agenda post 2015» promovido por instancias como la UNESCO y el Banco Mundial. El objetivo es retomar el conjunto de la obra de este autor como punto de referencia para el cuestionamiento del fundamento teórico que predomina en las políticas internacionales de desarrollo que apuestan por la «Educación para todos» y el «Aprendizaje para todos» en el siglo XXI.

**Palabras clave:** Illich; desescolarización; decrecimiento; Educación para Todos; Aprendizaje para Todos.

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## 1. Introduction

Key dates are quickly approaching in the calendar of international educational policy-making. Time goes by, and the foreword to the document accorded after the Dakar conference in the year 2000 begins to gain in stature in the worldwide debate on education: «States should strengthen or develop national plans by 2002 to achieve EFA (Education For All) goals and targets no later than 2015» (UNESCO, 2000, p. 4). That means that in less than one year from now, the six objectives proposed in the 2001 report from the Global Monitoring Report (GMR) will be due for examination (UNESCO, 2010). Once that deadline is reached (i.e., by the year 2015), the institutions responsible for making international education policy will have to face the challenge not only of evaluating the result of whatever achievements have been made, but also of reconsidering the existing objectives and designing new goals to inspire the lines of education policy for the upcoming decades. This is why the «post-2015 agenda», as it is known, may prove to be a point on the horizon open to reflection in terms of education policy-making. Following Camilla Croso, «The debate on post-2015 invites us to take on these challenges and debate the education we want, to what end and with which means» (Verger, Sayed, Hiroshi, Croso, Beardmore, 2013, p. 893).

In this context, it would be helpful to know which organisations have already begun participating on this new phase in international education policy-making. The World Bank report titled *Learning for All. Investing in People's Knowledge and Skills to Promote Development* (2011) may be analysed as a manoeuvre meant to influence the new scenario even before it has been properly developed. The report reflects a distancing from the line of thought in the GMR of the institution that «decides on the global directions for education policy, backed by grant and loan money that ensures countries follow those directions» (Klees, 2012, p. 152). The LFA (Learning for All) strategy leaves off investing in school infrastructures and writing up new curricula, and turns instead to «efficiency of the education system and [helping] reform its management, governance and finance», while at the same time trying «to lay the foundations of an education knowledge base by supporting the use of assessments of academic achievement, both local and cross-national» (Heyneman, 2012, p. 43).

It is interesting to note the starting point of the World Bank report. What the report calls for is in fact a sharp shift in the strategy underlying international policies, a shift based on the detection of overemphasis on the school question as one of the weak points of EFA. The hypothetical case is taken that meaningful, quality learning can improve the lives of broad sectors of the population more than does the expansion of low-quality, precarious schooling. For that reason, the World Bank says it is time, in preparation of 2015, to go beyond schooling

and focus on the question of learning as the key element to the future (2011, p. 3). This starting point is both highly suggestive in its nature and poor in its development. While the World Bank correctly notes that Education for All has to a great extent devolved into «Schooling for All», they fail to see that their Learning for All might just as well be dubbed «Evaluation for All». Moreover, the World Bank's overly biased research evidence to sustain the main normative ideas in their report, along with a directive and arbitrary tone in their lines of argument, has triggered an immediate knee-jerk response from scholars. Joel Samoff's words are representative of this reaction: «*Learning for All* has little to say about learning and even less about all» (2012, p. 120).

With this reworking of international education policies in mind, this paper proposes to contribute to the critique of post-2015 debate by drawing on the thoughts of Ivan Illich (1926-2002). His best-known writings underscore the risks entailed by compulsory universal education for large sectors of the population. He was a critic of modernity who zealously called for the need for institutional and technological limits at a time when economic growth and development and social progress were heralded as unarguable dogmas of wellbeing. As an intellectual he challenged the foundation of the human capital theory. His texts pose the option of centring the debate on international education policy on questions referring to the means for learning, and not so much on the spread of schooling or the investment in education as the mechanisms to ensure universal access to a quality education. At the same time, he repudiates the alternative of articulating a system able to measure worldwide learning efficiently and homogeneously. As a thinker, his work, despite being considered scantily grounded in theory, especially in the 1970s (McConnell, 1972; Gintis, 1972; Nassif, 1975; Petrovski, 1976; Hannoun, 1976), is taking on deeper significance in the context of 21<sup>st</sup>-century thought (Igelmo Zaldívar, 2012, p. 43).

At this point, it should be stressed that Illich's work is well known to the institutions that have been developing the framework for international educational policies over the last forty years. Suffice it to recall that Edgar Faure's UNESCO report titled *Learning to Be* took into account Illich's criticisms from his most famous book, *Deschooling Society* (1971). This is particularly interesting given the fact that Faure's work is generally considered as essential in designing the policies that currently support the EFA initiative that will be evaluated in 2015. It is therefore a good moment to look again at Faure's own words regarding Illich's work in 1972:

According to Illich, therefore, institutions should be 'inverted' and the school suppressed, so that man may regain his freedom in a society shorn of formal schooling, resume control of the institution and thereby recover his initiative in education. In their absolute form, these concepts do not seem to conform to any of the world's existing socio-political

categories, but their authors think that de-schooling society would sooner or later lead to an over-all change in the social order likely to break the present vicious circle in which education is trapped. (Faure, 1972, p. 21)

## 2. A return to Illich's «old» work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Until only a decade ago, Illich's ideas remained overly pigeon-holed in the field of education. Authors such as Douglas Pitt ironically pronounced him to be «only superficially attractive as a critic of the contemporary order» (Pitt, 1980, p. 288). For those who carried out their work within the international academic community on pedagogy as well as those who were in charge of developing international policies, by the end of the 1970s, Illich's name became systematically and exclusively associated with his utopian, romantic proposal for deschooling (Palacios, 1989, Lerena, 1983). The anarchistic aspects of *Deschooling Society* did little to encourage a more thorough analysis of his ideas (Hedman, 1979). According to David Gabbard, one of the reasons Illich became permanently stuck with this label in the collective mind of pedagogy in the 1980s has to do with «his violation of the messianic principle that governs its discursive formations», which could be justified by the fact of having «proffered serious challenges to the legitimacy of the Modern Project» (1994, p. 174). In addition to this cause can be added the difficulties involved in approaching Illich's work from a general perspective that would take into consideration his published works as a whole up until his death in December 2002. This all explains that in the two decades prior to his death, both Illich and deschooling became catalogued as examples of old theories, obsolete and out of date, with little to offer to a debate interested in sophisticated concepts, efficient processes and worthy statistics.

By the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, some approaches to Illich's works began contributing to a change in the focus traditionally given to his works. The two first attempts to study the legacy of this prolific intellectual from a perspective broad enough to encompass all his work were David Cayley's book *Ivan Illich in Conversation* (1992) and the collection titled *The Challenges of Ivan Illich: A collective reflection*, edited by Lee Hoinacki and Carl Mitcham (2002). Another book to add to the list is the posthumous book *The Rivers North of the Future: the Testament of Ivan Illich* (Illich and Cayley, 2005) in which Illich himself goes deeper into some of the main themes running throughout all his writings. These publications not only reveal the new lines of work Illich turned to after publishing his most famous essays in the 1970s -- namely, *Deschooling Society* (1971), *Tools for Conviviality* (1973), *Energy and Equity* (1973) and *Medical Nemesis* (1975), but also the new theories that he explores so as to lend continuity to the criticism from years past. Indeed, it was in the two decades prior to his death that Illich declared himself to be «increasingly interested in analyzing not what

tools do but what they say to a society and why society accepts what they say as a certainty» (Cayley, 1992, p. 128).

These broader, less constrained looks at Illich's work over the last ten years have greatly nuanced the depth and value it holds today. As intellectuals such as Charles Taylor have recently stated, «It is an understatement to say that those who have read the books for which Illich is best known, even those most enthused by them, have rarely seen into the rich and complex position which underlies them.» (2005, p. ix). Taylor, a Canadian philosopher, goes on: «Illich, in his overall vision and in the penetrating historical detail of his arguments, offers a new road map, a way of coming to understand what has been jeopardized in our decentred, objectifying, discarnate way of remaking ourselves, and he does so without simply falling into the clichés of anti-modernism» (Ibid, p. xiv).

In economics, international politics and even ecology, Illich's name has also begun acquiring a noteworthy presence. Among advocates of the degrowth movement, Illich's works have ended up having considerable weight (Latouche, 2006; Taibo, 2009). It suffices to recall that, from a philosophical perspective, degrowth originates in «a criticism of development, of growth, of progress, of technology and therefore of modernity» for the purpose of structuring a «break with Westernism» (Latouche, 2009, p. 124). This has placed Illich's ideas high among those who see the oxymoron of sustainable growth and encourage the development of «a paradigmatic re-ordering of values, in particular the (re)affirmation of social and ecological values and a (re)politicization of the economy» (Fournier, 2008, p. 532). The importance Illich's thinking has in this school of thought is made clear in its inclusion in the colloquium organised by UNESCO in Paris in February and March of 2002, titled «Défaire le développement. Refaire le monde», considered as a landmark meeting for degrowth supporters in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In the field of education, Illich's ideas are being reasserted from different sectors linked to the theory of education in the academic context. For example, theoretical positions such as exopedagogy assert that Illich's work «offers a possible resource for thinking through exopedagogy as an education forcefully reclaimed in the name of new social movements and new social forms beyond nation-states, capitalist expropriation, and global regulatory institutions» (Lewis, 2012, p. 846). In his theorizing on connectivism in terms of Internet, Stephen Downes sees Illich's ideas as becoming essential reference points that «could guide reconstructions of education to serve the needs of varied communities, to promote democracy and social justice, and to redefine learning work» (Downes, 2012, p. 382). This approach to Illich's work resembles the ones being taken by the developers of theories of education such as ecopedagogy (Kahn, 2011), invisible pedagogies (Cobo & Moravec, 2011), liquid pedagogy (Laudó, 2011),

expanded education (Díaz and Freire, 2012) and even *homeschooling*, *unschooling* and *flexi-schooling* (Farenga, 1998). Finally, an event that has confirmed this new interest in Illich's works has been the successful conference held at the Serpentine Gallery (London) in April 2010 titled «Deschooling Society» (Jelinek, 2012).

The proliferation the interest in Illich's theses is undergoing in philosophy, economy and alternative pedagogy contrasts sharply with the indifference shown by international educational policy-makers in re-assessing Illich's «old» works in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is despite the fact that recent reports such as the one presented by Lant Pritchett titled *The Rebirth of Education: Schooling ain't Learning* (2013) share a starting point analogous to the deschooling theses. This leads to addressing the following question: to what extent can Illich's ideas be of interest at the crossroads of the year 2015 in the design and theoretical support of the basic lines of international educational policy? This can only be answered by situating Illich's theses as a function of the two frameworks of criticism of modern educational institutions present in his ideas: a) criticism of the social impact brought about by the expansion of educational institutions, which becomes a bid to deschooling education, and b) the archaeological study of historical underpinnings of the emergence and settlement of educational discourse in the West and the option of de-educating society and culture. These two areas of study are ultimately responsible for relating the new insights Illich's ideas can provide in the debate on the objectives of EFA and LFA in the «post-2015 agenda» in matters of education.

### 3. The impact of expanding schooling

The way in which Illich criticises the consequences of expanding institutional compulsory schooling worldwide is found in his book *Deschooling Society* (1971). His suggestion is to re-examine the relation between schooling and the modern notion of education. The main conclusion of this analysis is that both phenomena can be considered in more general terms as a ritual (schooling) and its generating myth (education). Thus, the «education myth» generates the «school ritual» with the latter sustaining and reinforcing the former. This is a main theme in *Deschooling Society*. Furthermore, according to Illich, the concept of education, taken as the designation of a global category, has no particular analogy in other cultures outside of Christian theology. Therefore, any attempt at understanding school institutions requires acknowledging the illegitimate, religious nature that links the education endeavor to the Western world. Illich identifies four axes on which to sustain the mythical notion of education, worth explaining in greater detail: the myth of institutionalized values, the myth of value measurement, the myth of packaged values and the myth of self-perpetuating progress.

An understanding of the myth of institutionalized values as incorporated in institutional schooling involves conceiving the school as a process that «inevitably produces something of value and, therefore, production necessarily produces demand» (Illich, 1971, p. 8). In other words, school teaches that instruction produces learning, while class attendance produces a demand for schooling. Once that need is learned at school, «all of our activities tend to take the shape of client relationships to other specialized institutions» (Ibid, p. 39). In consequence, any non-professional activity becomes suspect to the extent that the self-taught individual is discredited by the institutionalization of learning. Thus, the myth of institutionalized values makes individuals addicted to being taught end up looking for their safety in compulsory education.

Next, the myth of value measurement refers to how the school initiates people in a world «where everything can be measured, including their imaginations, and, indeed, man himself» (Ibid, p. 40). The school institutions, in their attempt to break learning down into subjects, make participants in the ritual see that the results of the process can be measured on an international scale. What Illich's publications from the 1970s criticise is that personal development cannot be conceived as a measurable thing. There is no draftsman's tool, no curriculum, that can do that, not even by comparison with another person's achievements. In the learning process, what can be done is to emulate others in using their imagination or following in their footsteps rather than copying how they walk.

Thirdly, Illich gives his criticism of the myth of packaged values. The concept of the curriculum as a product made by the same process and with the same structure as any other merchandise is the basis on which the myth of institutional schooling is sustained. The starting point for analysing packaged values has a very similar theoretical base as the one his friend Paulo Freire poses in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in his criticism of banking education (Freire, 1970, p. 58). For example, for most schools, the curriculum is made starting with supposedly scientific research. Education engineers or modern-day pedagogues are the ones in charge of this job, and they focus their efforts on predicting future demand and the tools needed to build, theoretically ground and start up an assembly line of learners within the limits set by the assumptions and taboos of the day. The final phase of this process is developed at the moment the teacher-distributor hands the finished product over to the learner-consumer, whose reactions are carefully studied and tabulated to provide further data for the research in preparation of the next model. In this myth, the results from the previous study act as input for re-adjusting the grading scale, putting more or less emphasis on the student, encouraging teamwork or removing and adding new blocks of subjects.

The last myth observed by Illich is that of self-perpetuating progress. From this perspective, «school pushes the pupil up to the level of competitive curricular consumption, into progress to an ever higher level» (op. cit., p. 42). Following the line of argument in *Deschooling Society*, the function of the education myth, along with the rhetoric and corresponding school rituals, ultimately consists in ensuring the distance between what the system promises and what it actually achieves (Lister, 1974, p. 9). Even if nothing important in the curriculum is learned during this process, once a certain height is attained in this pyramid, at least the student learns the value of the climb. This position is one Illich had in common with Everett Reimer (Barrow, 1978). And as Reimer himself wrote at the beginning of this book *School is Dead*, those who are successful at school and those who drop out and even those who never set foot in a school all learn that school is the road to salvation and that their children will have to climb higher than they were able to on the endless ladder of schooling (Reimer, 1971).

As per that theoretical perspective, Illich believes it is possible to delve into how the education myth based on compulsory attending the school ritual has come to mean the opposite of the life process of learning that starts from a human environment (op. cit., 32). School education thus is more closely related to the consumption of a piece of merchandise and the accumulation of abstract knowledge on life, since it is a key element in the capitalist process of manufacturing knowledge. «School has become the world religion of a modernized proletariat, and makes futile promises of salvation to the poor of the technological age» (Ibid., p. 10). This is why Illich objects to turning the school into a compulsory ritual and thereby imposing the underlying myth of modern education but also encouraging a way of conceiving the relationship we establish with the natural environment.

This all helps explain how important it is for Illich to fight against any compulsory form or method of gaining knowledge, of regulating learning or accrediting wisdom (Jerome, 1973, p. 107). This involves deeply questioning one of the maxims that international policies have failed to resolve over the years, the notion that education in its schooling exegesis must be a compulsory and free right monopolised and monitored by the state. This dilemma took root in liberal societies (Kleinig, 1981, p. 201) and sets the basis for a delicate and passionate argumentation (Daudet & Singh, 2001). This idea is fundamental to any attempt to structure new lines that inspire educational policy in the 21st century, and is a very useful pillar in assessing the path taken by international agencies who have made compulsory education a means for guaranteeing the right to an education. Ultimately, the struggle against state-controlled compulsory schooling addresses the need Illich detects in modern societies of setting limits in geographic expansion and the invasion of institutions into the personal domain as



a way to ensure a «free flourishing of human autonomy and creativity» (Illich, 1978, p. 41). A propos here is a comment from Michael Macklin: «The principle method Illich proposes to achieve a humane society is the acceptance of limits on social tools» (1976, p. 14). That is why the works Illich published in the 1960s and 1970s regarding the impact of the spread of compulsory schooling raise far-reaching questions in the context of the «post-2015 agenda» in terms of its assessment and purpose. To a great extent, the formulation of these matters and the depth of their responses underscore the richness of some of Illich's ideas four decades after the publication of *Deschooling Society*.

#### 4. The criticism of discursive certainty in modern education

In the late 1970s, Illich put aside his interest in what institutional tools do and focused on more on studying what they say and how their discourse becomes accepted. He considered that under Western influence, human beings live in societies in which the most noteworthy effect caused by the system of institutional tools he had criticised in years past is in their ability to mould their view of reality and generate a certain degree of conviction. Some of the papers he published from this historical and theoretical position involved the puzzle of educational institutions and educational discourse. In the interviews held by the journalist David Cayley and published in 1992, Illich himself accurately poses the core question guiding his interest in this new phase of his thinking, summed up as follows: «Which are the conditions under which the very idea of education can arise?» (Cayley, 1992, p. 98).

The main conclusion Illich reaches in these critical approaches to the historical configuration of modern educational discourse developed in the 1980s and 1990s is that the need for education is the result of beliefs and agreements that gain meaning in the socialisation process of scarcity. Consequently, the role of educational rituals, as is the case with compulsory schooling, consists of «reflected, reinforced, and actually created belief in the value of learning pursued under conditions of scarcity» (Illich, 1996, p. ix). This leads Illich to a hypothesis that gains in relevance in the context of the «post-2015» debate: «If the means for learning (in general) are abundant, rather than scarce, then education never arises -- one does not need to make special arrangements for 'learning'» (Ibid., p. ix).

To understand the intellectual process by which he reaches this conclusion, it is important to take into account that, by the early 1980s, Illich himself believed that some of his postulates --especially ones with a prophetic bent posed a decade earlier in books such as *Deschooling Society* (1971)-- needed some reconsideration (Illich, 1987). What happened is that ten years after his book was published, the discourse on development spread like wildfire around the

globe and became the ideal par excellence of the worldwide system. In this time, Illich believes that many studies and pieces of research weakened the theoretical assumptions underlying developmentalist discourse. That is why it is not so important to insist on what the industrial model of development is causing in places where its own decadence is manifest, but rather, it is time to study what that spread has swept away in the field of culture over the centuries, and how this ideology has «transmogrified human nature» (Illich, 2010, p. 95). What Illich therefore proposes is a search for historical referents to interpret the new changes underway. In this new intellectual phase, as Aaron Falbel points out, «Illich came to question not only schooling but the very idea of education itself» (2002, p. 133).

Books such as *Shadow Work* (1981) set the bases for what would become his line of work for much of the following two decades. Illich took it as a priority matter to look deeper into the consequences of the shift in education discourse in the worldwide system. Faced with the ecological devastation caused by the sharp increase in the production of material goods following WWII, economics began adding services that had neither sales price nor salary counterpart. Specially noteworthy among all of them is the case of education. This was a phenomenon that was opening a rift between what Illich dubbed a subsistence economy, which was what had prevailed historically in every culture, and the economy of scarcity, which had become characteristic of the new world economy.

The new line of criticism Illich opened in his work as of the 1980s was based on the idea that maternal conception of institutions originated in European ecclesiastical history ever since the 3rd century A.D. This was a time when the dependence of individuals could be studied from a historical perspective with respect to an official bureaucratic institution that supplied *educatio*. By the late 1400s, the modern state began taking on education tasks that until then had been the responsibility of the Church. That was when a transfer began of the functions typically belonging to women, or to a maternal institution such as the Church, to specialised institutional circles governed by bodies of functionaries. In this transfer, the state ended up taking on the role of a many-breasted mother, each of which gave something different to fill a basic need. It was a process of secularisation that should be analysed with greater rigor but on which, according to Illich, modern pedagogy had only cast more confusion.

These lines of work by Illich confirm the fact that by the 1980s he had lost interest in studying the possibilities of deschooling education and instead focused on minutely analysing the increasingly urgent need to de-educate culture. Twenty years after publishing *Deschooling Society*, this led him to say his criticism from the 1970s on education institutions was a naive attempt at understanding the discursive complexity that maintains and strengthens education and its

institutions in the modern world. Although in *Deschooling Society* he made a sincere effort to reveal the damage done worldwide by the spread of institution-alised education, he later considered them off the mark in that he, at the time, had been barking up the wrong tree in his attempt at articulating a criticism of modern education institutions without paying attention to the weight that educational discourse has on the modern social mindset (Bruno-Jofré and Igelmo Zaldívar, 2012).

In his last two published books, *ABC: The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind* (1988) and *In the Vineyard of the Text* (1993), Illich explores the possibilities offered for the education historian in the study of new ways of the alphabetical mind. He considers that by exploring the history of education discourse from a critical perspective, one can better understand the thinking of whomever wants to learn and the leeway of whoever wants to teach. However, his interest in this matter is far from any pedagogical applications that may be derived from it. What he means to do is to use history to show that «literacy is threatened as much by modern education as by modern communication» (Illich, 1988, p. ix).

Illich highlights two reasons for education history researchers to begin their studies *on* education rather than only *in the field* of education. First, a history of the literacy of the mind can help clarify some of the objectives that were being driven by important international organisations in regards to fostering universal literacy by the year 2000. The question posed is summed up as follows: Do these campaigns have an effect on the literate mind, and if so, what is it? (Illich, 1992a, p. 556). Moreover, he deemed it necessary to differentiate between literate mind and personal aptitude for writing, which should be studied as two separate categories. Second, he sees that replacing the book metaphor with the computer can be a topic to be developed by those who do research on the field of knowledge of education. It is true that he does not see this as solving the problems that educational institutions are condemned to struggle with, but it does perhaps provide new focuses that can be used to begin to understand what is happening inside these institutions.

## 5. Illich's ideas in the «old» debate on the «post-2015 agenda»

Given all the above, a conclusion can be drawn regarding Illich's thoughts and their contribution to the «post-2015 debate»: the wealth of criticism he makes throughout his career about education and its institutions cannot be constrained to his book *Deschooling Society*. Although he wrote his most critical work on education institutions in the early 1970s—work that earned him mention in reports such as Edgar Faure's report for UNESCO in 1972, as stated earlier—in the 1980s and 1990s he published a set of key texts to understanding his ideas overall. In this second stage, school institutions were no longer the main

objective of his study. Rather, he rectifies the starting point for criticising school systems, he redefines the concept of education, he explores new methodological perspectives for studying the history of educational discourse and delves into the epistemological assumptions modern pedagogy has placed on the concept of education.

This general conception of his work is sparking interest in renown philosophers such as Charles Taylor, economic schools of thought such as degrowth and new alternative pedagogies. It may also ultimately prove useful in the «post-2015 debate». Seen from this perspective, Illich takes his place as an author able to open two fundamental lines of discussion in assessing international policies that take the Jomtiem (1990) and Dakar (2000) conferences as their reference: a) the debate on the impact of worldwide universal compulsory education on consolidating the myths and rituals of schooling in a vast range of the population and their alternative of degrowth in schooling, and b) the historical study of the consequences that modern education discourse and its conception of education as a means for acquiring the scarce good of learning has had on the survival of cultural diversity worldwide.

Shifting between these two coordinates of criticism posed by Illich involves making a close analysis of the front between institutions such as UNESCO --and their attempt at giving continuity to the general lines of EFA --and the World Bank-- and their turn in favour of the notions given in LFA. In this context of debate, reflection and struggling for power, far from developing a work in pursuit of a particular goal or a set political or social purpose, Illich sets about dismantling objectives and goals that have acted as scaffolding for the structuring and epistemological justification of education systems in the West throughout history. In his writings, Illich himself encourages everyone who truly wants to transform the large education systems and escape from the corrosive effects of compulsory schooling to « develop the habit of setting a mental question mark beside all discourse on young people's 'educational needs', or about their need for a 'preparation for life'» (op. cit., 1996, p. ix).

One important conclusion that can be gleaned from study of Illich's work on the whole is the need to put consensual limits not only on the relationship that human beings establish with the natural environment, but also on the spread of institutions that direct how people live together in society. It does little good to extend compulsory education to large portions of the populace if no one knows how much education one needs to live well. It makes little sense to foster plans and invest money in increasing the rate of primary schooling in underdeveloped or developing nations while the main economic powers of today keep structuring their education systems to last longer and longer and reach eccentric levels of specialisation. In Illich's words, «A society committed to

high levels of shared learning and personal intercourse, free yet critical, cannot exist unless it sets pedagogically motivated constraints on its institutional and industrial growth» (1978, p. 68). That is why thinking in terms of degrowth and decreasing times and places for education, rather than in increasing and enlarging school systems in the logic of «more is better», could be a first step towards Illich's ideas.

Similarly, as mentioned above, another field where Illich's ideas encourage further exploration involves doing critical research on the discursive configuration of education in the modern social mindset. The starting point for this analysis is expounded by Illich in the following terms: «The history of *homo educandus* deals with the emergence of a social reality within which «education» [planned learning] is perceived as a basic human need» (1992b, p. 113). Although this field is as yet unexplored, at this stage of the 21st century there are more than enough historiographic studies available to perform a critical analysis on how education has been gaining ground in discourse on development and progress in the West. A return to the studies on this matter for designing educational policies may be highly inspirational and may also lead to reconsidering not only the theoretical foundations to education and its institutions for the future, but also the impact they may have on the world stage. When seen from this point of view, Illich's ideas are no longer merely his theoretical musings from a bygone day, but a new approach whose potential for rethinking old aspirations of the most recent international educational policies is ripe for exploration.

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