



## From Lifelong Education to Lifelong Learning: Reneging on the Social Contract

**Abstract** This chapter traces the concept's trajectory from an expansive notion as promoted by UNESCO, to the adoption of the term Lifelong Education, to its transmutation in the hands of the OECD and the EU, among others, to the reductive notion of Lifelong Learning where the primary emphasis is on personal rather than social responsibility and the main preoccupation is with employability which does not necessarily mean employment. In the initial part, light is shed on the work and ideas of a group of writers gravitating around UNESCO, some being utopian in tenor, while others, such as Ettore Gelpi, being more pragmatic in approach. The main part of the chapter focuses on the EU and its ICT and employability policy discourse centering on the notion of developing a Knowledge-Based Economy. We also note a return to a more holistic notion of Lifelong Learning as propounded by the UN with respect to the Sustainable Development Goals. We argue that for these goals to be

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realized, the LLL concept must be stripped of its 1990s+ baggage to become holistic in scope.

**Keywords** Lifelong education · Lifelong learning · Self-directed learning · Employability · Sustainable development

## LIFELONG LEARNING AS PART OF THE DOMINANT DOXA

Europeans have grown used to pronouncements and declarations on learning. The same is not true in most Western States such as Canada and the USA, where education is overseen often at the local level and the most significant pronouncement is the budget allocation to schooling or higher education. If there is a policy directive on education, it is often focused on early years such as the controversial No Child Left Behind and its successor Every Student Succeeds.

In Europe, the EU and various international bodies such as UNESCO and OECD see themselves as dispensing wisdom on the direction of education and learning, certainly the case with the EU Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (LLL) produced in 1999, and its much-awaited follow-up document which has not materialized. Members of the EU Grundtvig working group, and others attending workshops (now called social innovation labs) and conferences in connection with this action in the decade following the publication of the Memorandum, were promised this follow-up document. For many, us included, there was hope that this much anticipated new document would take on board insights derived from the various critiques of the Memorandum that were made, as part of the consultation process, in different settings. These included discussions held within the EU's different "epistemic communities." We were eager to see whether there would be departures from the *doxa* which dominated the previous decade and whether lessons had been learnt from the critiques. The critiques were made not only in Brussels and related forums but also in national seminars, in member states, as well as in the literature. This topic drew writers not normally expected to feature in the LLE/LLL literature including the redoubtable Zygmunt Bauman who wrote about it in one of his "liquid" books (Bauman 2005) and later in an adult education compendium (Bauman 2013) published a couple of years before he passed away.

One of LLE's major exponents, theorist Ettore Gelpi, also weighed in on the debate with a book published in his native Italian around the time of his passing (Gelpi 2002). All was not perceived as being well in the State of LLE, or LLL, by many writing in this vein. Indeed, the signs of a transition in emphasis and purpose, in the LLL discourse, had already been explored by a variety of writers with a strong critical acumen and social justice orientation, Mark Murphy (1997), Bill Williamson (1998) and Ian Martin (2000) featuring among them. They certainly exposed "the serpent" beneath "the innocent flower." The same is true of the person who introduced one of us, when an undergrad at the University of Malta, to the concept and philosophy of LLE, the professor in question being Kenneth Wain (1987, 2004a). Bauman quotes Wain prominently, on LLL, in the *Liquid Life* chapter (Bauman 2005, p. 122).

These and other writers provided alternatives, based on expansive, sophisticated conceptualizations of LLE that built on the earlier UNESCO writings, drawing on major writers such as Jürgen Habermas, John Dewey, Michel Foucault, Raymond Williams, R.H. Tawney, Bogdan Suchodolski, Seyla Benhabib (cf. Wain 2004a) and others.

Almost two decades have passed since the EU Memorandum's publication. The much promised, in EU circles, production of a revised and updated document, remained just that—a never-to-be-fulfilled promise. What was provided instead was a skimpy Agenda for Adult Learning which can be interpreted as a last-ditch attempt, by a group of socially conscious educators, to keep adult education on the EU agenda for education.

We feel that the critiques, emanating from different quarters, would have provoked an overall response, as promised. If not a response to critiques from those like us who articulate a more grassroots and social justice-oriented LLE, it could, more recently, have been one that addressed LLL (Gleason 2018, p. 7) as conceived by, for instance, the World Economic Forum which, through its Chairperson, Klaus Schwab (2016), heralded the brave new world of the 4th industrial revolution (4IR). Spokespersons for this "revolution" advocate, on Capitalist grounds, a process of LLL that extends beyond STEM, engages the imagination, and accords pride of place to the humanities (Lewis 2018; Gleason 2018, p. 6). We register our concerns regarding what is, in effect, a broad notion of LLL, guided by the imperatives of Capitalism and not by those of a grassroots democracy. This notwithstanding,

the expansive discourse contrasts strikingly with the narrow economic-oriented approach to LLL that prevails in most of the policy discourse internationally.

In this chapter, we provide an overview of the concept as it has changed from its UNESCO origins, to that transmogrified by the OECD but most specifically by the EU, as captured in the six messages of the EU's Memorandum on Lifelong Learning. The latter type of LLL changed the concept in almost ludicrous ways, distorting a once expansive concept beyond recognition—diluted/adulterated old wine in new bottles? We also attempt a preliminary articulation of how this concept can be recast to retrieve its former expansive nature, and be revitalized by raising questions over agency, the “right to govern” (sovereign citizenship), ecological responsibility, and sustainability. It also attempts an initial articulation of how it can be carried forward to spearhead an education fostering the idea of a world not as it is but as it can and should be, in terms of ensuring dignified living within what some Indigenous people call the “web of life.” In short, this would be LLL/LLE for dignified living within and throughout the cosmos (O’ Sullivan 1999; Berry 1999; Clover et al. 2013; Leal Filho et al. 2018).

### THE IMPETUS FOR THE CONCEPT’S ADOPTION

The Lisbon European Council of March 2000, for its part, declared the European Union’s target to be that of becoming the “most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world” (CEC 2001, p. 6), a very bold assertion still being repeated today despite the fact that ten years have elapsed since the original target year—2010. Eight months later, and in response to the conclusions reached in 1996, designated the European Year of Lifelong Learning,<sup>1</sup> the European Commission produced the much referenced “A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning” (referenced above) which was meant to provide a set of guidelines for educational policymaking in member states, the EEA, and accession countries, each of which carried out a broad consultation process (CEC 2001, p. 7). This process involved a variety of actions including seminars in which the Memorandum was disseminated. Efforts were made to develop national strategies for lifelong learning, as we shall indicate in a later chapter.

## UNESCO: UTOPIANISM AND PRAGMATISM

Lifelong learning has, since the 1990s, been and still is a key feature of the EU agenda for education (see Murphy 1997, p. 362) and a knowledge-based economy (KBE). As Wain and others have indicated (1987, 2004a), its progenitor, “lifelong education”<sup>2</sup> has been around for an even longer period including the late 60s and early 70s when it was promoted by UNESCO as its “master concept” for education. It was an integral part of UNESCO’s wide-ranging strategy which took on board the different forms of education, including those of a nonformal type emerging from Latin America, Asia and Africa, that had been documented in different parts of the globe. As part of an overall strategy to promote education for everyone, for which limitations were registered with regard to the building of appropriate infrastructures, it had to broaden what counted as education. It sought to valorize what people always had, irrespective of institutional structures, namely forms of nonformal or informal learning. Education occurs in a variety of settings, not just schools and higher education institutions. It can occur “Under the shade of the mango tree,” to adopt a phrase from Paulo Freire (Ch. 1, in Freire 2016). It can occur in a garage within a shantytown on the outskirts of a Brazilian or other megalopolis. It can occur among miners in the pits and during their break-time, as one former (pre-1984) National Union of Miners (NUM) activist in England once put it to one of us: reading *Capital* in the pits, with regard to collectively-directed political education. It can occur among fisher-folk on the jetty, besides the sea of a fishing village in the Mediterranean or in a different “primary production” setting in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada (Lotz and Welton 1997). These are all part and parcel of the kaleidoscope of ongoing education and learning, LLE/LLL if you will.

UNESCO had a decidedly “Third World” orientation at the time, as volumes focusing on Nonformal education in Latin America indicate (Elfert 2017; La Belle 1986; Torres 1990; Kane 2001). The UNESCO version of LLE was promoted through a body of literature comprising books and papers by a motley posse of writers, some Liberal, some Radical, some Marxist or Marxist-Existentialist, some Scientific-Humanist. Humanism lay at the core. The list would include Paul Lengrand (1970), Ettore Gelpi (1985a), R.H. Dave (1976), Bogdan Suchodolski (1976), Rodney Skager (1978), and Arthur J. Cropley (1980), all men alas. A key book was produced titled *Learning to Be*

otherwise known as the Faure Report, named after the first contributor (in alphabetical order), Edgar Faure, in a long list (Faure et al. 1972). Some of the writing had its basis in Scientific Humanism embraced by Julian Huxley, UNESCO's first Director-General (see Finger and Asún 2001, p. 22). In Kenneth Wain's words, it "had a left-wing, humanistic, democratic core, and concerned itself with individual growth and social development" (Wain 2004a, p. 86).

Though broad in scope, the early lifelong education movement, promoted by the Faure Report (1972) through UNESCO provided an expansive and humanistic view of the entire process of human learning "from the cradle to the grave." It reflected the openness of the post-War period and the belief that education was meant for self-actualization. Kenneth Wain refers to two waves of writing in the area, namely the more evolutionary utopian wave (e.g. "towards a learning society") and the alternative pragmatist approach (e.g. what shape have learning societies taken or been taking in different contexts in different periods?). One focuses on a society that is not yet while the other is more empirical and pragmatist, arguing for taking stock of and building on what is, rather than what should be. Wain had argued that the utopian wave can be easily criticized on the grounds that it provides a very optimistic view of a "common humanity" in which difference is subsumed under a single model, according to which a common destiny beckons (Wain 1987, p. 230).

### THE PRAGMATIST TURN

Kenneth Wain refers to an alternative model of the learning society proposed by those members of the second wave of "pragmatist" writers:

The alternative approach is that proposed by the pragmatists, who are ready to reverse all these tendencies, to take different societies as they are and to adopt a pragmatic approach toward the concept of the 'learning society'. They are thus ready to argue that there is not any one model of such a society that can be universally imposed, and that the shape any 'learning society' will take depends upon an ongoing dialectical relationship between the ideological, economic, cultural, educational features *that it already has*, and the lifelong education programme, embodied by 'progressive' individuals or groups within that society who are prepared to take the 'long march through the institutions' that it requires. (Wain 1987, p. 230)

Wain's adoption of Rudi Dutschke's (German student leader) "long march" phrase implies an evolutionary process that takes time.<sup>3</sup> Wain includes Ettore Gelpi, who directed UNESCO's now defunct Lifelong Education Unit in Paris, among those who favor a pragmatist approach to lifelong education: an historical and comparative approach (see the next chapter) with the emphasis being placed on, not this concept's future possibilities, but the actual present day reality in which lifelong education is rooted (Wain 2004a, p. 19). Gelpi once wrote that LLE is not a new idea as it is a feature of many traditions, emerging from different parts of the world. What is new, he argues, is the *popular demand* for lifelong education (Gelpi 1985a, p. 18), alluding to global widespread efforts to democratize access.

In some of the more facile conceptualizations of lifelong education, we come across the rather problematic statement that it is characterized by both "vertical" and "horizontal integration," terms which were criticized within the movement itself. Gelpi, for instance, stressed the idea of conflict within societies, pointing to the opposition of formal and nonformal education in contexts such as Latin America at a time when countries in this region, such as Chile, were under authoritarian rule (Gelpi, in Mayo, 1985a). This was part of the reality which a number of UNESCO member states faced at the time.

The central concept is that of the human being (or "man" as they wrote at the time) conceived of within a humanist notion of individual growth, almost in synch with the German notion of "Bildung." It was all about "being" in a world increasingly embracing the consumer-culture ideology with its stress on "having," in Eric Fromm's important distinction. Paul Lengrand (1970), a Marxist-existentialist, argues:

Education is not an addendum to life imposed from outside. It is no more an asset to be gained than is culture. To use the language of philosophers, it lies not in the field of 'having' but in that of 'being'. The being in a state of 'becoming' at each different stage and in varying circumstances is the true subject matter of education. (Lengrand 1970, p. 59)

The Faure Report presented a similar view. In its normative sense of providing "worthwhile" knowledge, learners were regarded as "beings" in the process of "becoming."<sup>4</sup> One can detect individualistic overtones here, extending to the idea of self-directed learning, easily appropriated later by those arguing for atomized individuals in a neoliberal world, a

theme to which we shall return when discussing contemporary appropriations of this concept. R.H. Dave, however, makes a brief passing reference to the “collective” (Dave 1976, p. 4). We can speak of collectively-directed learning to reinforce the idea of sociality and that learning is a social act. This underscores the collective dimension of knowledge for change promoted by Paulo Freire (2018) and others. Joan Bofill’s (1985) education as participation, a feature of a communal participatory democracy in a Catalonia emerging from the Franco years with their totalitarianism and cultural suppression, fits this rubric nicely. He highlights communal festivities offering possibilities for collective learning. His was a prominent voice at a Mediterranean conference on Lifelong Education, held in Malta in 1984 (see Wain 1985). It complemented similar voices of key figures at the conference whose conceptualization of adult education, within the context of lifelong education, was likewise conditioned by the demands of a post-fascist context (Alberto Melo 1985 regarding Portugal and George Papandreou 1985 regarding Greece).<sup>5</sup> Later, D. W. Livingstone and Peter Sawchuk (Livingstone 1999, 2004; Livingstone and Sawchuk 2004), from Ontario Canada, and Borg and Mayo (2005) devoted ample space to a collective version of lifelong learning, the former regarding workers’ education and the latter regarding education in general and social movements in particular. Patricia Gouthro (2009), also from Canada, gave space to a critical notion of lifelong learning that included women learning individually and together, in contexts as varied as the home place and the workplace and community.

Scholars provided radical versions of learning as “becoming” that recall Freire’s notion that the human being’s ontological vocation is to become “more fully human,” a concept he modified, in his later writings, around the time of his demise, to people striving to become less contradictory, “less incomplete” (Freire 1997). In a Marxist-humanist version of LLE, Warsaw University scholar Bogdan Suchodolski (1976, p. 95) writes of the need for education not to be predetermined. The allusion is to an education based on *praxis*, with creative activities and the full development of human faculties as characterizing growth. Production had to be “economized,” organized in a manner that allows for full personal and collective development. This was meant as an antidote to what Durkheim calls “anomie” and also what Marx regards as “alienation.” Suchodolski wrote, in this regard, about consumption and the media, also addressed by Gelpi (1985b), therefore positing that one of the tasks of LLE is to confront and dismantle the consumer-culture ideology. One had to learn



or unlearn to eschew the hegemonic idea of a two-dimensional human being, namely a producer/consumer, roles that Marcuse collapsed into the image of “one-dimensional man” [*Sic*].

The concept of an ‘education-centred society’ promises to show the way out of the hopeless situation resulting from the “producing society” and the “consuming society.” Keeping the restraints and obligations imposed on society by production and consumption within rational boundaries, this new concept manifests the profound values of the human existence, thanks to an intensification of all human abilities and energies that further the development of the whole personality. (Suchodolski 1976, p. 64)

There was therefore plenty, in the old UNESCO literature on LLE, which can be built upon to subvert the current hegemonic economy-oriented notion of LLL and transform it into one that can serve as a genuine democratic and emancipatory alternative (Williamson 1998). The reductionist image of people as producers-consumers, whose sense of (individual) “liberation” is marked by their consumption patterns (slavery masked as freedom), is discarded. It is ditched for that of people as social actors participating in and extending the life of the polis (Martin 2000, p. 5).

## THE DISCURSIVE SHIFT

The LLE movement of writers around UNESCO died out in the late 80s while the concept of LLL had by then already been used by the OECD (1996). Note the OECD’s emphasis on “learning” rather than “education” in what looks like a far from innocent discursive shift. There has been a shift in emphasis from educational structures to individuals (Tuijnman and Boström 2002, pp. 102–110); individuals urged to “pull up their bootstraps” and take charge of their own learning—self-directed learners. John Field (2001) provides a good and helpful overview of the development of LLE/LLL as promoted by various intergovernmental institutions. While UNESCO provided a broad use of LLE, the OECD used LLL within human capital theory, “albeit laced with a few dashes of social democracy” (Field 1998, p. 6), and unabashedly continued to do so (OECD 2007). The OECD rendered “lifelong learning” a “policy goal.” (Field 1998, p. 31). John Field (2010) writes:

In practical terms, the activities undertaken by UNESCO and OECD mainly helped focus policy attention on the educational needs of those who had benefited least from the front-loaded approach to initial education. In industrial nations, this often involved developing educational entitlements for workers, with laws on paid educational leave in a number of countries. In some, there was a broad entitlement to leave for general purposes (as in Sweden, and in state level laws on *Bildungsurlaub* in Germany); in other cases, educational leave was guaranteed for specific purposes, such as vocational training under the French law on *congé de formation* or British laws on health and safety and workplace representation. Many more countries experienced a growth of adult basic education, with particularly impressive innovations in adult literacy provision and women's basic education. (p. 90)

The change in economic climate in the late 70s, with a “more fragmented and turbulent labour market” and the growth of consumerism in Western societies, made the concept of lifelong education lose much of its appeal (Field 2001, p. 8). It did re-emerge in the 1990s in, apart from the OECD, the one supranational organization that has the power to influence the educational policies of sovereign states—the EU. It could however influence such policies through funding mechanisms, evaluation measures and classifications, etc., although it strictly cannot dictate policy in education which remains a matter of national sovereignty. In a situation, however, when many organizations in Europe and beyond (e.g. European Union centers at USA, Australian, and other universities) have become totally dependent on European Union funding, the influence on LLL policy is significant.

LLL's definition underlined the economic imperatives of this discourse: “all purposeful learning activity, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence” (CEC 2000, p. 3). This definition was formulated in the context of the European Employment Strategy launched at the Heads of State European Council, Luxemburg, 1997 (CEC 2000, p. 3). Learning became a code word for putting citizens to work and thereby strengthening the GDP.

### THE MEMORANDUM'S MESSAGES

The EU's Memorandum on Lifelong Learning foregrounds six key messages. These are: (a) new basic skills, (b) investment in human resources, (c) innovation in teaching and learning, (d) valuing learning,

(e) guidance and information, and (f) bringing learning closer to home. It is important to point out that, though most of our discussion focuses on Europe, this discourse concerning lifelong learning has global resonance, though it is more pronounced in high and medium income states. Renowned Ecuadorian practitioner and researcher, Rosa Maria Torres (2003, as cited in Field 2010) argued that “lifelong learning” is very much a westernized concept which displaces the focus from the role of adult basic education as a contributor to development in the “majority world” (p. 91). As Field (2010, p. 90) remarks, the connection between the modern concept of LLL and the interests of the industrially most advanced countries, within the context of globalization, represents another significant shift from the old discourse of lifelong education as promoted by UNESCO and the Faure report which, we reiterate, was very much “majority world” or “Southern” influenced. As indicated by a variety of writers, including Gelpi (2002), the discourse focuses primarily on “employability” which, as he argues in the same text, does not necessarily mean employment. A brief discussion on basic skills would provide some indication of the main thrust of this document in terms of its “employability” orientation.

### NEW BASIC SKILLS FOR ALL

A report published by Cedefop, Eurydice (2001), reveals a range of interpretations of the term “basic skills.”<sup>6</sup> However, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the dominant discourse on “basic skills” is labor market oriented. The net result of this orientation in curriculum reform is that

Arrangements for guidance, support and identification of skills needed by the labour market, in cooperation with the social partners, are highly significant aspects of curricular provision. (Cedefop/Eurydice 2001, p. 15)

This trend toward the marketization of curricula is echoed by Viviane Reding (2001), former European Commissioner for Education and Culture, in her Preface to the above-mentioned document. Reding asserts that it is crucial to “adjust our educational systems to the requirements of the economy and the knowledge society” (p. 5). In truth, what we are provided with here is a range of functional skills in a narrow notion of competences, a key word in the EU discourse. This discourse highlights a “commercially and market-oriented” type of competences (Gadotti 2008,

p. 43), often measured through a positivist approach and according to outcomes, something which Wain (2004b) has criticized, citing Lyotard's notion of performativity in this context (Lyotard 1989, pp. 47–53). The notion of skills as vocational preparation is universal. In Canada, for instance, literacy funding is typically located in the provincial ministry of Labour (MacPhail and English 2013).

The kind of competences given importance in the dominant discourse are those that should, in theory, enable persons to become more in demand in the labor market, more “marketable.” This is all in keeping with the commodification and marketization of education. Education is no longer regarded as a public good. It is, to the contrary, regarded as a consumer product, to be had and held, not lived. It is often emphasized this way by slogans such as “If you think education is expensive, try ignorance,” slogans that appeal to the “common sense” of a consumer-culture ideology. In this context, “lifelong learning,” particularly in its adult learning component, signifies the updating of competences in a vocational sense, in view of the mobility of capital and the opportunities and hazards this mobility provides for employment. Education, and especially post-compulsory education, including adult education, serves to develop “human resources.” Developing human resources signifies, in this context, the attainment of those competences, reflected in the basic skills underlined in Message 1, that attract and maintain investment and that permit the labor force to render industry more “competitive.” They render human beings marketable, commodities to be bought and sold for not their “use value” but their “exchange value.”

Granted, we recognize the need for a good technical and vocational adult education set up. This is not problematic. Just because we argue for a more broadened education that helps develop a person's whole range of subjectivities, this does not mean that we give lip service to one's work capabilities. Quite problematic however are a few things. The first is the mortgaging of a child's future which, in the long run, serves to limit one's possibilities at work and in life in general. This is the point that Gramsci made with respect to vocational education (*educazione professionale*) in the reforms introduced to Italy by the Fascist Minister of Education, Giovanni Gentile, during the time Gramsci spent in prison for his political beliefs and commitments. (Gramsci 1975) The second is limiting what would otherwise be a broad range of human competences and skills to narrowly defined ones, those that fit the short-term economic demands and hence the labor market. Then there is the view regarding education as

an individual and not a social, including community, responsibility. This is the neoliberal agenda in education, more accurately neoliberalism *tout court*. It is one that confines the broader qualitative dimensions of education to a few. These include those who amass wealth and contacts through social, cultural, and economic capital accrued from attending elite institutions exempt from these restrictions. The rest are offered the chance to buy vocational services according to market prices. If not having the wherewithal to do so, they are fobbed off by an underfunded, restricted “education” that keeps them in poverty and skirmishing on the periphery of the market. These divisions and forms of educational apartheid apply not only to schools but also to universities and other higher education institutions. The fourth is, in the case of education and work, learning *how* to produce, without questioning *what* to produce. Vandana Shiva’s writings on soil and not oil raise questions regarding what we produce, in addition to how we produce (Shiva 2016).

This brings into focus the issue of LLL predicated on biodiversity, the fostering of healthy and cosmically inclusive human–earth relations and the safeguarding of Planet Earth. This aspect of LLL is conspicuous by its absence in the EU’s Memorandum. A follow-up Memorandum was expected to be released to address this issue and the related issue (climate change and its discontents) of Migration. Suggestions in this regard were put forward at EU sponsored conferences regarding the Grundtvig program, such as the one held in Brussels in early spring 2011. That this follow-up policy document did not surface tends to fuel further suspicions that the EU policies regarding LLL are all about economic competitiveness with little regard for basic human concerns about situations that threaten our existence as humans and that of the planet that we inhabit. These are the issues regarding LLL that we will raise further in this book.

Missing from the Memorandum’s section on “basic skills“ is the notion of what Freire and others (Lankshear and McLaren 1993; Shor 1999) would call “critical literacy” defined in Freire’s sense of “reading the word and the world.” This is something which cannot be measured in positivist terms, according to the instruments geared to condition such results—again *performativity* in Lyotard’s terms. Critical Literacy is something which cannot be measured through the kind of quantitative indicators normally used in these measurement exercises, LLL indicators called “quality indicators.” Critical Literacy would render the discourse on “new” skills (critical literacy is not a new literacy but can be stretched

to include new literacies such as critical media or critical digital literacies), in the Memorandum, less dominated by the ideology of competitive individualism. It would render the Memorandum more capable of serving the development (hopefully ongoing development) of a critical citizenship and therefore an education for democratic and dignified living.

Broadening the notion of “skills” in this vein, we can speak of those that enable persons to become, in the words of the Italian critical pedagogue, don Lorenzo Milani, “cittadini sovrani” (sovereign citizens) who enjoy the “right to govern” rather than simply “be governed” often, in the latter case, at a distance through self-censorship. We are here referring to the idea of atomized individuals who facilitate *governmentality*, in Foucault’s sense of the term. Governmentality refers to the State’s production of citizen behaviour according to its policies, fostering mindsets and practices that allow subjects to be governed “at a distance” (English and Mayo 2012). The alternative skills and competences, or, more broadly speaking, qualities called for by critical citizenship, are meant to equip persons not only individually but also collectively, as advocated by Paulo Freire. Persons would thus be equipped with a range of competences that would allow them to contribute to the development of a genuinely democratic environment. A reductionist discourse concerning competences and education would lead to a democratic deficit. It is important to hearken back to the still relevant discourse concerning education, democracy, and the public sphere developed by John Dewey, Jürgen Habermas, Michael Welton, Andre Grace, Patricia Gouthro, Aldo Capitini, Maxine Greene and others, many of whom are frequently cited in the more expansive literature on LLE/LLL, the learning society, and the public sphere.

Also included in this first message is the skill of being able to take charge of one’s own learning, something that, as we have shown, existed and was appropriated from the old UNESCO literature which also counterbalanced this with ideas and projects having a collective and community dimension. This dimension is rarely to be found in the EU and contemporary hegemonic discourse on LLL, although nothing is monolithic, including the EU, and many have demonstrated ways and means, at “on the ground” municipal or territorial (in Italy’s *territorio* sense) levels, to circumvent the discourse in many ways—hope springs eternal. The overall tenor of the prevailing discourse, however, remains individualistic. It almost echoes Margaret Thatcher’s neoliberal dictum that “there

is no such thing as society.” Responsibilization (read individual responsibility) is the mantra. The entire responsibility for learning is thrust on the individual, often at great financial expense, with the danger that failure to achieve can be explained away in “blaming the victim” terms. Similarly, the term self-directed learning, seemingly innocuous, tends to penalize learners for needing a teacher, wanting mentorship, and requiring direction (Servant-Miklos and Noordegraaf-Eelens 2019).

Education, according to these tenets, remains something which one acquires as a positional good and at an expense. People are exhorted to organize their budgetary spending, through financial literacy promotion campaigns, in such a way that they invest in their continuing education on which their employability chances depend.<sup>7</sup> The fallacy of this has been underlined in writings (Berg 1974) underlining that lack of jobs is part and parcel of the crisis of the Capitalist system itself and has often little to do with people’s lack of investment in their own learning. The increasingly post OECD and later EU economy-oriented discourse on education has made the LLL concept a panacea for existing social ills. These include the Capitalist system’s inability to provide jobs with a measure of security, with the resultant emergence of a *precarité* situation, in a world characterized by “liquidity,” “risk,” and “obsolescence.” A strictly reductionist LLL notion suits this scenario perfectly as it serves as the means to present a “jobs crisis” as a “skills crisis” (Marshall 1997).

The discourse occasionally ventures beyond the strictly “economic” to encompass “well-being,” with its great market pull. After all, as Panagiotis Sotiris remarks:

One should never forget that Neoliberalism is not just an economic policy. It is also the attempt towards production of a particular subjectivity centred upon economic self-interest and competition, in sharp opposition to other, more critical forms of subjectivity, such as that of the active citizen or the conscious worker. (Sotiris 2014, p. 319)

This provides people (those who can afford the relevant programs) with opportunities for learning to cope with emotional stress said to emerge from the brain’s chemical imbalances (certainly not to be discounted). What is not said, however, is that for all the talk of “get on your bike” or “invest in LLL,” much anxiety is caused by the dysfunctional structuring of Capitalist forces that are shaping people’s lives. They generate a sense of insecurity and despair deriving from the current situation of

austerity, precarious living, and inability to plan long term. (Cooper and Hardy 2012, pp. 60, 61). This is all part of what Mark Fisher calls “Capitalist Realism” (2009, p. 19), based on the notion that people can see through the fact that Capitalism has not delivered “big time” but, at the same time, cannot come up with any alternatives. Many have constantly been remarking that the Left itself has gone “bankrupt” (Giroux 2014)—no pun intended given the bank-induced financial meltdown at the heart of recent crises and COVID pandemic. It can be argued that, rather than forms of learning which treat the symptoms, people require forms of learning that provide a critical reading of the causes that lie, to a large extent, in the structuring forces at play. Once again, the call is for a dose of critical literacy that enables one to unveil the contradictions that exist in society, learning for social change and not learning simply for individual adjustment and accommodation. Alas, “social well-being” is becoming such a part of the widespread doxa that it insidiously and uncritically creeps into the education field, rendering the kind of provision of which it forms part—“learning for domestication” and the “ideology of accommodation,” to echo Freire’s earliest writings.

The issue is thus individualized, rendered a matter of personal responsibility, a sure way of preventing it from becoming a much wider public issue hopefully igniting calls for structural change. On the contrary, any social contract in this regard is contained within the Capitalist system, and thus it does not transcend its parameters (Giroux 2020). It is a contract that does not serve to change Capitalist structures into more democratic ones. It, to the contrary, serves as a “band aid” remedy to help solidify capitalism (Giroux 2020). In these neoliberal times, this leads the State to abdicate its responsibilities in providing the quality education to which every citizen is entitled in a democratic society and shift them entirely onto the learners or larger entities such as NGOs, etc. In short, it becomes another way for the state, the modern neoliberal state, to renege on a broader, transcending (present structures of domination and inequality) “social contract.” As indicated earlier, the shift from “lifelong education” to lifelong “learning” accommodates this discourse. We reiterate the view, expressed by Eduard Lindeman and many others, that learning is a social act (and the notion of a “learning society” points us in this direction). It is partly the responsibility of what was once a social state. In this context, the Memorandum’s term “social skills” would assume a broader meaning, than simply adaptation to social customs and mores.



It would neither limit itself to the notion, often expressed in EU circles, that the skills required in social life are the very same skills required at the work place—a new form of “Fordism” if you will where LLL would thus become another instrument for moral and physical regulation of social and intimate life to enhance productivity. What happens outside and inside the bedroom is as much a concern for Capitalist production as what happens at the workplace, the sort of reinforcement of psycho-physical habits once satirized by Charles Chaplin in the film “Modern Times.” If anything, the onset of Covid-19 made this correlation even more pronounced with people working at all hours from home, in an individualized, atomized manner (Giroux 2021) through online work, assuming that they have the means to carry out this work and earn a living without being placed on furlough, or unabashedly discharged outright (Giroux 2020).

The same applies to LLL which is gradually becoming more digitally mediated and atomized, reaching those who have the means to avail themselves of the contingent platforms, while many others, those who require more careful pedagogical approaches, including specific learning conditions (not settings where, even if a computer is available, there are too many people struggling to gain access to the terminal at specific times and in an overcrowded home space) become more disengaged. There are differentiating and discriminatory “invisible” LLL pedagogies at work here. Rather than LLL for all, what we seem to have is LLL for some, often those whose economic, cultural, and social capital, in Bourdieu’s sense (Bourdieu 1977), is commensurate with that required for the new teaching/learning contingencies, to the detriment of the many. The fear is that this contingency will continue to be availed of post-Covid given that it ticks a lot of the business model boxes and suits the neoliberal agenda to a tee. The EU Memorandum is itself very ICT oriented and while we are not saying that it places exclusive emphasis on this, with blended approaches not being excluded, we trust that, post-Covid, LLL will not take this exclusive route.

A concept of LLL for critical sovereign citizens would, to the contrary, be intended to generate social skills that go beyond adaptation to self and social creation and recreation. It implies the social, the communal, and matters of solidarity. How do we create the relatively safe communal spaces that, even in times of pandemics, provide access to the facilities necessary for LLL for all?

## A WAY FORWARD

In sum, the over-emphasis on work, employability and ICT indicates that the discourse thus far is removed from a broad conception of education that takes on board the different multiple subjectivities that make up citizens. It still gravitates around the notion of a knowledge economy which, as certain research from Canada shows, is not the reality people are made to believe it is. It is a discourse that limits human beings to two-dimensional persons, consumers and producers, rather than expands the conception to embrace a more holistic view of persons who have the skills to engage critically and collectively not only *in* but also *with* the work process and also engage in a public sphere marked by difference. This would entail a notion of citizenship that can be called “really and critical active citizenship,” embracing the “collective” (in the sense of people working and acting together, complementing each other), rather than, once again, the notion of the atomized individual (Giroux 2021) citizen that is often promoted by the dominant discourses surrounding citizenship, to which the current Covid-19 pandemic provides much grist for the mill. Many of the issues being faced throughout society call for coordinated collective actions involving both ICT and the streets and squares. This makes us recall the numerous demonstrations in Greece and other parts of Europe, and in many parts of the Arab world, in what has been optimistically, but prematurely, dubbed the “Arab Spring,” not necessarily attaining the desired outcomes (the struggle remains an ongoing one). They are also public, and not simply individual, issues that entail social responsibilities.

As the literature on this kind of action has shown time and time again, this ongoing social engagement would entail constant learning and relearning, pointing to a notion of lifelong learning that, as expounded on by Wain (2004a) and others (e.g. Williamson 1998), constitutes a refreshing alternative to the one that prevails. The alternative to the hegemonic one lies in a type of lifelong learning that has been occurring for years but which has not always been recognized as such. It is one which is inextricably intertwined with ongoing popular struggles for the creation, safeguarding, and enhancing of democratic spaces in which men and women live as social actors. Yet, despite the proven effect of social movements and protests on collective change, there are some such as David Brooks in the *New York Times* who view them as ineffective and

who see policy change as coming from inside the system though so-called “conservative radicals” (Brooks 2020).

In short, there are a number of issues which the EU Memorandum failed to address, issues which concern humanity and the rest of the cosmos in its entirety and its diversity. We argue for a LLL process geared to a global citizenship, one which is inclusive and which knows no distinctions between the majority and minority worlds. For this to occur, we require a conceptualization of LLL/LLE that transcends that of the EU and its obsession with regional competitiveness within a differentiating Capitalist framework that continues to spawn inequalities and offer “band aid” solutions to and for them. Recall that the original impulse of establishing LLL as the main concept in the EU’s knowledge-based economy derived not from educators and cultural workers who have the potential and tradition of seeing education, and not simply learning, in broad, holistic terms, but from the European Roundtable of industrialists in the mid-1990s. Theirs is a vision that is perforce limited to the areas in the hegemonic discourse highlighted above. They are there to consolidate Capitalism. We would argue, specifically in later chapters concerning LLL and the SDGs, that we require a process or processes of LLL that call for structural change and that transcend the Capitalist mindset and framework. In the next chapter, we visit the work of a key exponent of UNESCO’s LLE discourse, Ettore Gelpi, and his concerns regarding the subsequent distortions of the concept and possibilities for its renewal.

## NOTES

1. Council Conclusions of 20 December 1996 on a strategy for lifelong learning (97/C 7/02).
2. For helpful discussions concerning the genealogy of the concept, see Field (2001), Tuijnman and Boström (2002), and Wain (2004a). See also Elfert (2017).
3. It could well be part of the ‘long revolution’ that Raymond Williams, who was ready to help a recovering Dutschke (shot at close range) complete his thesis at Cambridge, wrote about.
4. More than 2 decades later, the Delors et al. report, also from UNESCO, named the four pillars of learning and education as “learning to know; learning to do; learning to live together; and learning to be.” Elfert (2015) notes that the Delors report does not use lifelong learning but rather “learning throughout life” p. 92.

5. Both experienced exile during their respective country's period of totalitarian rule. The experiments that Melo writes about are very much Third World influenced, emerging from Latin American popular education experiences. He ironically left his position as director of adult education in the Ministry of Education (see Lind and Johnston 1986, p. 61) in Lisbon because of differences in terms of orientation; there were misgivings about the 'Third World' orientation of many of the programmes. Personal conversation with Alberto Melo, Brussels, 2011. Papandreou would later become Greece's Prime Minister who had to grapple with the massive debt situation for which he and his government suffered the ignominy of resigning to be replaced by a government of technocrats imposed by the EU and the troika. The financial meltdown ironically led to claims concerning 'collective learning' occurring within the 'indignados' movement that took to the streets protesting against the 'debtocracy' (see English and Mayo 2012).
6. For a broader discussion of the actions surrounding Message 1, and therefore 'Basic Skills', contained in the 2001 Cedefop/Eurydice document, see Walters et al. (2004). For a broad discussion of the actions in connection with all six key messages, presented by the 2001 Cedefop /Eurydice document, see Borg and Mayo (2005).
7. This 'financial literacy' drive is also increasingly viewed with suspicion for its 'blaming the victim' connotations (see English and Mayo 2012, p. 33).

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