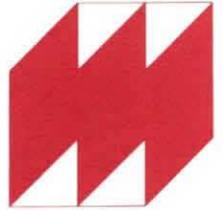


*The contemporary challenge for education: how to encourage and equip volunteers to shape their commitment to and responsibility for society.*



**Centrum voor  
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Vorming**

School  
voor vrijwilligers

Landelijk  
steunpunt  
vormingswerk  
met vrouwen

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vormingswerk in  
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Project  
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## GENERAL INFORMATION

### Center for Informal Education

The "Centrum voor Ingebouwde Vorming" (Center for Informal Education) is a center specialized in research, consultancy and development of educational material, for the voluntary sector (volunteers and professionals).

The Center stimulates the founding of voluntary organizations in several areas and promotes the professionalization of volunteers and their organizations.

Our aim is to encourage, support and improve innovative and educational activities in voluntary associations and organizations.

We have initiated and developed projects on e.g.:

- The relation between volunteers (non-paid) and professionals (paid)
- Projectmanagement for voluntary organizations
- Public Relations training course
- The art of lobbying for voluntary associations
- The culture of social movements in civil society
- Videos on special themes as:
  - \* basic computer use
  - \* volunteer recruitment

The Center for Informal Education provides you with excellent tools to achieve your goals.

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1989 EUROPEAN SYMPOSIUM ON THE ROLE OF VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS  
IN THE CULTURE. 4-8 September BALATONSZABADI HUNGARY.

lecture: Jo Houben.

#### ON ADULT EDUCATION IN VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS IN THE NETHERLANDS

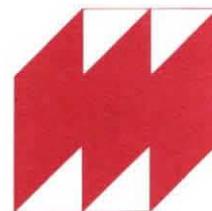
The Netherlands, a small country already, but it is crawling with organizations. That is not meant to be negative. Absolutely not. Because a society without a social network of groups, associations and organizations is a society without a heart. The exact background of this flourishing culture of organizations can not be told in three sentences and moreover is not the subject of this lecture. Still I will tell you something about it.

It were not the liberals, nor the conservatives of the previous century who have made social life in our country as it is now. The origin of this rich culture of organizations should not be looked for in the pillarization of -let us say- the Twenties and the Thirties. No, it were mainly the religious who - building upon centuries old clerical structures - gave the impulse with their ideas about 'organic society' and 'autonomy in your own group' already in the second half of the previous century. Not much later the socialists arrived, or in better words, the labour movement originated. In constant tension with each other, but held together by invisible threads, both movements took large parts of the Dutch population out of their isolation and organized it socially and politically.

#### PILLARIZATION

Thus far this historical digression, which teaches us at least one thing: whoever thinks about education, or built-in education as you like, will have to go deeply into the continuous influence of social organizations and in particular, pillarization on social life. Many of the social and cultural capacities the Dutch possess are linked to this history.

The social structure in Holland was indisputably dominated by the pillarization until deep into the Sixties. Pillars can be described as a coherent network of social, cultural and political organizations based on one (religious) ideology. As for the social structure the pillars display a cross-section of the Dutch population. The pillar structure was so strong that in that era the religious and ideological distinctions for the most part pushed back the class differences. The Catholic part of the population fitted perfectly in this description of the pillars. Next to the Catholic pillar one had in Holland a socialist, a protestant and a liberal pillar. Besides those pillars some other strict Christian groups and a communist group existed which organized themselves in a similar way. But they were so insignificant they could hardly participate in the social communication between the pillar-organizations. This way they were closed off from the real centres of power.



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The system of pillarization produces a special type of social organizations:

- the pillars and the pillar-organizations had a hierarchical structure;
- the communication inside the pillars and their organizations went from the top on down;
- only the top level took care of the communication between the pillars;
- the top-levels consulted each other and organized social consensus;
- the rank and file of the different pillar-organizations were strictly kept away from each other and images of each other as enemies were widespread;
- the rank and file was completely dependent on the top of the own pillar-organization for her information;
- social attitudes were organized in the own group;
- schooling and education consisted of transferring the beliefs of the top and were in fact a form of propaganda.

A far-reaching knitting of beliefs, daily life and pillar-organizations is characteristic for the pillarized society. The pillar-system ran on the huge voluntary efforts of large parts of the population. For those involved it organized their participation in public life completely. In the case of the Catholic part of the population this produces the following picture.

Catholic church  
Catholic political party  
Catholic schools (education)  
Catholic hospitals  
Catholic unions  
Catholic employers union  
Catholic libraries  
Catholic district-nursing centres  
Catholic soccer clubs  
Catholic women's association  
Catholic agricultural union  
Catholic union of large families  
Catholic .....  
etc.

The same applies for the Protestant pillar, the socialist pillar and the Liberal pillar.

Pillarization should be viewed in the first place as a system that kept people in place. At the same time pillarization can be seen as a system which gave shape to the emancipation of parts of the population.

No matter how one looks at it, this era has a very uniform pedagogical climate. Schooling and education are not only based on the hierarchical relations inside the organizations, but also on the hierarchical relations between the the different organizations of the pillar.

After all, also inside the pillar itself there exists hierarchy.

For example in the Catholic pillar the church and the political party disputed the highest position.

#### SOCIAL CHANGE AND SOCIAL EFFECTS

In the Sixties all kinds of manifestations of a process of social change come to the surface:

- technical innovations;
- urbanization;
- emancipation;
- mass lay-offs;
- changing role of the government;
- creation of middle-groups.

These social changes have their social effects. New needs and new groups come into being. The pillars, for decades the home of an organized existence, lose their significance fast. New lines of information and communication possibilities add to this. Suddenly people can get their information everywhere.

In the Sixties one forced the room to participate in the public domain outside the system of pillarization.

Next to the pillar-structure forms of organizations and bonds arise fast which do not have any consideration with the written and unspoken rules of the years passed. Particularly on democratization the efforts are intense. Groups - especially those at the base of the pillars - which avoided each other up till then, get in contact with each other reluctantly. New possibilities of communication, urbanization and an increasing governmental interference contribute considerably to this process.

#### PEDAGOGICAL CLIMATE

It will be clear against this background the pedagogical climate underwent a drastic change. The emphasis, until now mainly on transferring ideology, shifts to democratization and independence. The access to institutions of education was also enlarged. The paternalism which saturated the pedagogy on the contrary survived for a large part this transition and appeared in new forms. In response a network of facilities in the field of education came into being in the beginning of the Seventies outside the pillar-structure. It concerned mostly facilities which were financed by the government and ran by professionals, in contrast to the facilities of the pillar-era, which were run on the voluntary effort of the members.

#### TRADITIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

It lasted until the Eighties before these developments really penetrated the traditional pillar-organizations and created room there for a new pedagogical climate. The pillar-organizations obstructed changes for a long time and did so massively, but when they applied their influence and rendered the changes free passage, they immediately gave it a massive and irreversible form.

The tenacity of this process is also connected with the double-sided character of pillarization, it keeps people in place and emancipates them. The hierarchical relations in the pillar did

not prevent people giving form to their culture by using the social structures the pillar provided. One has to consider that for many just letting go of their own culture and organizations did not guarantee any improvement in their position. Others expected improvements outside the organizations. They threw themselves into the social struggle and partly lumped together in what is often called 'the new middle groups'. The pedagogical climate within organizations where old hierarchical structures were monumentally present, did not change so easily. Outside pressure was needed (government policy on decentralisation, loss of social prestige, loss of membership) to carefully break the rigid patterns between the top level and the base. The rank and file should be heard more and better, which showed in a slowly accepted principle everywhere that education should start from the experiences from its participants.

#### THE SOCIAL MIDDLEFIELD

It is often forgotten but organizations are not only present in public life but they also co-organize it strongly, they are the driving force behind it. They are not only the cement of society, but also give it vitality, they jazz it up.

This also produces the superiority of the open Western societies in which we live, in spite of their flaws and shortcomings. Just look at that part of the world, the world of the socialist countries, which always felt far superior above Western democracies because of her strong social slant. 'In the East the society means nothing, the state everything', Antonio Gramsci wrote, in our country unknown but adored in Italy, when he tried to analyze the weakness of Soviet communism. Perestrojka and glasnost may try to salvage what can be salvaged, but for the time being only developments in Poland and Hungary can voice hope.

Why? Not so much because a new and appealing political leadership is being developed. Also not because the government in all his echelons is thoroughly turned inside out and swept clean, but more because there is a civil society, a lively space between state and individual coming into being, being able to originate. The way is cleared for free enterprise, to use that horrible term once again. The pressure is off, people can breathe, can unite themselves and find themselves back. This gives pre-eminently room for education, and built-in education too. The government does not have to do anything but stimulate.

Culture-sociologist Zijderveld words it as follows:

'There exists a powerful social middle-field, when people in all kinds of groups - associations, organizations, parties, types of societies - undertake all kinds of things together and when all these connections possess a decent degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the state. If, for whatever reason, this middle-field becomes a continuation of the state, it loses its functions as a buffer and a filter vis-à-vis the power of the state and the influence of the state on its citizens. Power of state and influence of the citizen then lose their mediation, their arbitration. They become direct, harsh and impertinent.'

And this has been proved in a very painful way only recently. A society where the state has everything to say, and defends itself at all costs. China. A society, for centuries closed off from the rest of the world, started modernizing, but encountered 'itself' in a tragic way. Or in better words: her old, tough structures of

the state. Which appeared to allow everything, as long as the character of those structures of the state were not a point of discussion. What asked the Chinese more than human rights and the freedom to unite? What China lacks is a civil society, a pluriform 'social middle-field'.

#### PUBLIC LIFE

Is the forming of organizations only important to keep society in balance, to prevent social damage? Some might have those degrading thoughts, but I do not. Individuals participate in public life in other ways, even more often, just think of individualization which has been praised to the skies. Or they do not. Because it also occurs often that groups stay in the shelter of their familiar organizational culture, do not leave it. Some people even stay home grumbling on their chair. In short, organizations are essential. They are a necessary but not sufficient condition for participation in society. They can enrich the social contacts, but only on condition they open up. Built-in education - because it functions within organizations - can play a pivotal role in realizing that goal. Before I discuss built-in education in voluntary associations any further, I want to make some remarks on 'participation in society'. Another teethgrinding term. It suggests people only participate in the social process on and from the moment they decide to. As if people not always function socially, for example in the contacts they maintain and in the things they do. Often this is coupled with an arrogant frame of mind of the users of the term that starts on the premise that people are only worth something if they participate fully in the labour circuit, are at most of middle age and show up in public life. It is also a lousy term because it is a flat depiction of the matter. It does not concern something so pale, so incredibly boring as attending society. One attends when somebody has left this world for another. People do 'participation in society' if they are angry about something, fight for a good cause, get enthusiastic for something - sometimes passionate, sometimes rationally and sometimes blind to the consequences of their acts, but never because they can not think of anything else. Always because they stand for something, go for the unknown. And I would add: built-in education goes along with that social adventure, teaches people to compose their own travel guide and time-table.

#### PARTICIPATION IN SOCIETY

But I am using the term participation in society anyway. As it happens it also expresses something worthwhile striving for. So I do not use it because it happens to be a common term in the profession I am working in. Participation indicates people have to try to get someplace they are not already by definition, or which they can reach effortless. I mean public life and the power circuits around them, the iron ring of political professionals: people who take decisions, who stand in the centre of society. The fact is that the sources of power are unevenly divided in this world and participation in society in an emancipating perspective, look out: that is what I am talking about, concerns the activities of people who do not submit unquestioningly to the limits they face in their daily life.

The participation in daily life is indeed very diverse, but usually mirrors the power set-up in society. The social inequality is often also expressed - next to income - by the way people are capable to word their own situation and participate in public life. As philosopher Nauta puts it, deprivation and discrimination relate to how people - possibly with the help of certain facilities, for example research - can be defined out of the public sphere. Particularly in a society that strongly emphasizes individuality and privacy the public sphere has a principle meaning: in this sphere one can stand up for one's interests. Here the confrontation with other groups is taken up. In the degree one has more the occasion to differ of opinion with others on certain subjects, paradoxically the opportunities to share values with them increase, even the opportunity to form a concensus. Exclusion of the forming of opinion puts pressure on the forming of concensus and often leads on the one hand to conservatism (holding on to old values and habits) and on the other hand to the refusal to accept values ( for example expressed in petty criminality).

#### BARRIER

A salient fact in this regard is the following on the social position of the aged. Three-quarters of the elderly has to manage with one-quarters of the total of the pensions, while one-quarters of the elderly get three-quarters of the pensions. This last category, however active in society and doing good things, will manage anyway. To them individualization is not a impregnable barrier. On the contrary it enables them to profit of the ever enlarging offer that so to speak is thrown into their lap. For this category in the United States marketing strategies are being developed. There they are discovered to be an interesting group of consumers.

But how is the other, much bigger group? This does not consist of autonomous consumers, who can buy their presence and influence. They have to sort it out with others, of their own kind. For this group organizing is crucial. That is not only necessary to word their interests, to raise their voices, but also to keep their independance (for example by means of communal living) and to undertake pleasant and useful things together.

#### PLURIFORMITY. A PAINFUL PROCESS, A CHALLENGE TO ADULT EDUCATION.

The image of society has become a lot more complex the last decades. Next to the old pillar-organizations new groups presented themselves, like the new middle-groups, women, ethnic minorities, the elderly, homosexuals. In social and political life simple issues (environment, emancipation, (un)employment, peace) displace the familiar discourses based on a all-embracing ideology.

A fluctuating and sometimes obscure melting pot is settling in. The communication channels and patterns out of pillarization do not work anymore. The first steps to a pluriform society have been made. Nevertheless also this process turns out to be tougher and harder than many think.

New groups may be originating but their social participation and position is still quite weak. Only in Ireland less women have paid jobs than in the Netherlands compared with other West-European countries. An unacceptable high percentage (40 %) of members of ethnic minorities is unemployed.

The extremely difficult integration of new groups finds possibly its cause in one of the more hidden aspects of pillarization. Pillarization as a social system was strongly based on images of the other as enemy, on exclusion. In daily life one closed one off of others than members of the own group. Others were seen as threatening the own identity. In the era of pillarization integration of the native Dutch already was extremely difficult. It is my premise that this quality in a pluriform society manifests itself by the way of indifference to other groups. As long as others keep their distance nothing is wrong. Despite the pretence there is no real debate, no real forming of concensus.

Adult education in social organizations will produce an important contribution particularly in this context. An important condition is adult education being able to stimulate from a relatively autonomous position the maturity and independent thinking of her participants. This way the concerned forces in society (for example associations and movements) themselves can become a focus of debate. And education can also there contribute to change instead of reproducing the existing situation.

Speaking in this context on adult education three characteristics jump forward, which, and I emphasize this, should not be broken apart.

First, adult education does not work with a fixed curriculum, a learning process planned in advance with a closed conclusion. In this she pointedly distinguishes herself from the regular adult education in the Netherlands. Thinking and acting, reflection and action can thus influence each other optimally.

A second given is that adult education takes place on the interface of individual and society, the public sector as I called it earlier.

Third, adult education chooses its goals in strengthening participation in society, especially also through other channels than paid labour. It should be aspired to help conquering the dividing up of social life, which is characteristic of this society, in 'opposite' domains like work and time off, economy and culture - which has its consequences for the learning of people. Adult education should contribute to the reinstatement of the coherence of different aspects of reality now experienced as isolated.

This leads me to the following thesis: adult education is a collective process aimed at learning to word in public common interests and views and to enlarge the related capability to act. This type of education, and that is what makes it special, is in fact one continuous, organized debate.

It is important to realize only very few people are allowed to conduct this debate in a completely open and unprotected space, in the full light of the spotlights. I am referring to television and radio, papers and magazines, to culture, to large conferences and congresses, to parliament, town councils, you name it. It should be the final goal, but right now the shelter of the own spot is very important. It is a condition for any shaping and developing of thoughts. Experiences in other countries underline this thesis.

'Some ten years ago Allen Tough in Canada did a pioneering study of how adults learn. He and his assistants studied 'learning projects' of adults. Learning projects can concern a wide field of capabilities, like being better in social contacts but also more practical matters as handling a micro-wave oven. He concluded that almost everybody realizes one or two of those

learning projects per year. They are set up out of curiosity, or because they are important for them, or because out of pleasure-seeking. In only 20% of the cases programs are used which are planned and executed by professionals in an organization or institution. In 80% of the cases people plan their learning themselves and use friends, family, people-who-know out of their personal network and of course all kinds of written and audio-visual material.'

Also the study that has been done on the initiative of the Centre for Built-in Education into the character of education in six national associations ( four women's organizations, the Netherlands Institute for Adult Education/Friends of Nature and the Society for Public Welfare) shows the enormous size of education. In those six organizations together one and a half million times per year there is participation in an educational activity. The study of Tough as well as that of the Centre for Built-in Education lead to the conclusion more attention should be given to autonomous learning and to the creation of favourable conditions for this.

The results of the study of the Centre for Built-in Education are summarized in a paper available to you and written by Willem Houtkoop and Bernadette Erich.

#### LEARNING

How does this process of learning works? Education should be seen as a deliberately organized debate. It is a process which takes the experiences of the participants as the starting-point. By relating different experiences with each other and position them in a social and political context, new information comes out or at least the need for new information. Linked to the original experience of each participant this leads to synthesis, which are clues to new scenarios for action. In a scheme:

experiences

experiences

information/education

synthesis

synthesis

Competent coaching and intervention are necessary in letting new information originate as well as in the process of synthesis. If education is no more than a extrapolation of the own perspective on life, or of the own dreams about it, she will not or hardly contribute to the own interpretation of the world.

#### LEARNING, TO WHAT PURPOSE?

What is the purpose of all this? The forming of groups and emancipation go hand in hand, and emancipation is always a combination of power building and social and cultural activities. Emancipation is not feasible when it is not based on a combination of power building and mutual service rendering. But one should immediately remark that influence is not thrown into your lap, one has to achieve it, earn it by acting oneself. From

history we can learn that organizing and strenghtening mutual services by means of health funds, insurances, sanatoriums and such are connected inseparably with the culture of organizing. To obtain power adequate skills are needed. In public life certain rules, certain social codes apply and certain capacities are needed, whether one likes it or not.

By this short digression we return to the main theme of this lecture: built-in education in voluntary associations. Which can help people to voice themselves efficiently, to enlarge their capacity to articulate.

#### PROFESSIONALS AND VOLUNTEERS

Strenghtening the selfconsciousness by being present on all relevant spots in society and raise a voice - to me that is what it is about. Also here looking back can help. If we summarize the history of social organizations in a nutshell, we can distinguish the following stages:

1. Around the turn of the century organizations, set up and ran by 'volunteers';
2. In the Twenties organizations recrute the first professionals from their midst;
3. In the Sixties society modernizes, the state enters the middle-field, a large group of professionals presents itself;
4. In the Eighties limits are put to the means of the government, professionals get into central roles and direct and coordinate the volunteers;
5. In the Nineties the middle-field of society revitalizes. The awareness develops that having organizations in the middle field of society is essential. Volunteers take up a new central spot inside organizations. Boards manage again, professionals will be 'pushed back' into the role of supporting;
6. May be we are already in a next stage, a stage where new ways of cooperation between volunteers and professionals come into being. To give honour where it is due, the organization is for the volunteers. Professionals can provide a necessary contribution to the quality of the organizing capabilities.

Jo Houben,

Centre for Built-in Education,

Utrecht, juli 1989