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## Visions unite through the concept of democracy: The school and the Popular Adult Education

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With a point of departure in the concept of democracy, this article aims to show how Swedish Popular Adult Education influenced the content of the established school system in Sweden. The Popular Adult Education and established school systems are studied through their relation to democracy, based on curricula, as well as on visionary and political steering documents. In accordance with conceptual history, the study shows how Popular Adult Education and the established school, with their different spaces of experience and references to separate traditions, gradually became accommodated through a common horizon of expectations about the importance of democracy. When this coalescence appeared, an administrative shift could be identified and the Popular Adult Education Movement was partially disarmed.

*Keywords:* democracy, Swedish education, Popular Adult Education, conceptual history

“Sweden is a study circle democracy.” Olof Palme (from a speech at the UN, 1972)

### The Swedish School: A Democratic Role Model

For a while, Sweden was considered to have one of the strongest schools in the world (see for example Isling, 1980; Carlgren, 2009). It was especially due to the focus on democratic ideals, both as a means and a goal, that the small country up in the European north gained a good reputation. Successful as it was during the 1960s and 1970s, that was preceded by political and visionary struggles lasting almost a century (Isling, 1980). In a constant aspiration for consensus which characterized the Swedish political climate during major parts of the twentieth century (Carlgren, 2009), the different operators in the domain of the school needed time to be convinced about how a democratic school could be beneficial for society. This article takes as its point of departure one of the operators in the field, namely Popular Adult Education, and its fight to introduce democracy in society by way of education.

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### Popular Adult Education Today

*Folkbildning* (directly translated, “education of the people”; hereafter Popular Adult Education)<sup>1</sup> in Sweden is a part of the liberal non-formal education sector constituted by two kinds of institutions: Study associations and Folk High Schools. Courses and educational programs are mainly provided by the Folk High Schools, while study circles and cultural programs are the prime instruments of the study associations. They are largely financed through funding grants from the State, county councils and municipalities. Despite this economic dependence, they stress that they are free to shape their own activities based on the idea of “overall objectives.” The movements behind the initiative of Popular Adult Education emerged from a generally very low level of education among people in general and the fact that very large groups of the population were excluded from higher education. There are currently 10 study associations in Sweden to which the Swedish National Council of Adult Education distributes grants. The study associations have different profiles and various emphases in their activities, aiming to create a diversity of learning situations. There are close connections between the study associations and the Swedish popular movements, such as those of the disabled, immigrants, or environmental organizations. Many Folk High Schools are run by popular movements, such as organizations within the workers’, temperance, or Free Church movements. Others are operated by county councils or regions. Even though the concept of Popular Adult Education is not commonly used in the everyday rhetoric, almost two million participants are included in associations connected to it (*Folkbildningsrådet, Fakta om folkbildning, 2012*).

### Frame of Article

This paper begins with a description of the theoretical points of departure, based on a general understanding of conceptual history’s three key concepts: *The collective singular*, *the space of experience*, and *the horizon of expectation*. A presentation of the history of Popular Adult Education follows, alongside references to the development of the established school system. Both of these traditions are presented through their use of the concept of democracy and are treated under the headlines of four different periods, starting from the late nineteenth century and ending in the present. In the conclusion, the concept of democracy is seen both as an indicator of and as a factor for change, in that the concept is assigned great importance for the unification of the visions of oppositional Popular Adult Education with those of the State.

Empirically, the steering documents of these different forms of education have been the primary source. The curricula of the established school system have, together with the overall objectives of Popular Adult Education, formed points of departure for this article. Research about Popular Adult Education has been used along with, for example, the very thorough works of the educational historians Åke Isling (1980) and Gunnar Richardson (1983 and 1999). As has already been stated, the concept of democracy has been in focus in the reading of these texts, and the aim has been to create an internal conceptual history of education in general and its relation to the concept of democracy in particular. The historical relation between Popular Adult Education and the State has previously been researched

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<sup>1</sup>The Swedish word *bildning* originates from the German word *bildung*, which refers to a kind of self-cultivation in which focus is put on a process of “creation”.

by, for example, Alvar Svensson (1996), Lars Arvidson (1985), Bernt Gustavsson (1991), and Gösta Vestlund (1996). These studies have primarily focused on the institutional as well as the organizational level. However, no research has been conducted about Popular Adult Education and the State that has taken as its point of departure the theories and methods of conceptual history.

The aim of this paper is to discuss two different forms of education, which have developed in politically very different contexts, in relation to the concept of democracy. The concept of democracy in education is seen as an active part of the processes taking place during the twentieth century, as are the visions of a democratic society as a uniting force of the historical oppositions represented by Popular Adult Education and the State.

### Conceptual History—Concepts and Temporalization

In the theory of conceptual history, language plays an essential role in the understanding, representation and narration of history (Jordheim, 2003). Unlike discourse theory, language is assigned great importance through the concepts that are seen as indicators *of* as well as factors *for* change in society. The Anglo-Saxon version of conceptual history, with key figures such as Skinner and Pocock, has, unlike its German cousin, its point of departure in the actors' room for unintentional as well as intentional change. The perspective taken by German conceptual history forms a central point of departure in this paper.<sup>2</sup> As they are entangled in each other, the social and political world and its linguistics cannot be separated. As Hansson (2008) sees it, concepts are to be regarded as concentrates of historical contexts, in the content of which meaning has been added and subtracted. The meaning of the concept is connected to specific words and it is sustained in the communicated context. A word becomes a concept when the context in which the meaning of the word is used becomes incorporated in the word itself (Bödeker, 1998). Therefore, concepts offer keys to historical knowledge, although without being equal to history. According to Koselleck (2004a), words can be defined and concepts only interpreted. The ambiguousness of the concept gives room for different contents, allowing the concept to organically shift in meaning when being used (Bödeker 1998).

### Collective Singular: The Denial of Complexity

In retrospect, the appellation of historical events can linguistically appear as descriptions of clearly limited and defined events. According to Koselleck's concept of the *collective singular* (Koselleck, 2004b, p. 33), this tendency runs the risk of denying ambiguity in the character of the concepts. This is exemplified with *history*, a concept the meaning of which, Koselleck shows, has gone from being plural, referring to a multiplicity of histories (peoples, nature, things), to portraying an illusion of the past as only one singular history.

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<sup>2</sup>Conceptual history has explicitly been used relatively sparingly in pedagogic research in Sweden, although some research has been done lately. The most interesting is Andreas Bergh's dissertation from 2010 in which the point of departure was the Swedish schools' use of the concept of "quality." With a relatively short time perspective, Bergh showed, amongst other things, that the meaning of educational quality has been incorporated in the meaning of results and market quality. A broader time perspective, much more similar to the one used in this paper, is used by the educational sociologist Ulf P. Lundgren (see e.g. 2010).

Through language, a comprehensive greatness is suggested, denying the shortcomings of the ability of languages to portray historical events in all their ambiguity. Modernity as such implies these conceptual reductions of complexities within the meanings of the concepts, leaning towards an objective scientific worldview. Obviously, this interferes with the hermeneutic-based conceptual history. Apart from being a critique of this reduction of historical events, it is also a critique of the circular as well as the linear, progressive view of time. Koselleck uses another example of interest in this paper in relation to the concept of democracy, based on an article of the major work *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* by Werner Conze and Otto Brunner (1972–1997). According to this, democracy has gone from being just one of many possible forms of governance to being the one and only form. All political parties, almost regardless of their ideological basis, claim to be democratic and aim to encourage a democratic society. Universal in its essence, the concept of democracy is used by everybody, although filled with a broad spectrum of content, meaning, and significance. As Koselleck sees it, a struggle appears between political forces to restrain each other's interpretations of the concept, in order to gain precedence in the formation of its meaning.

### **Between the Spaces of Experience and Horizons of Expectations**

The perhaps most well-known concepts from German conceptual history have clear references to the hermeneutic tradition of Gadamer, among other hermeneutics, namely *the space of experience* and *the horizon of expectation*. According to this tradition, these tenses form, alongside the present, a temporalization which also appears within the concepts themselves. In every concept, experiences of the past and expectations for the future are expressed (Koselleck, 2002). The tight relation between concepts and temporalization has drawn Koselleck's attention to forming what can be seen as a rather interesting philosophy of time in which the transition of modernization plays an essential role (Koselleck, 2004c; 2004d). In previous society, occupation was inherited and few left their home villages; people in the past had horizons of expectations clearly delimited by the space of experience. The ability to imagine something new and to consider alternatives to that which already existed was constrained. Moreover, the church had a great influence on people's expectations and visions for the future, and visionaries had to acquire authorization in order to express their prophecies. Eventually, along with modernization, the many possibilities which arose made the horizon of expectation less dependent on the space of experience. Suddenly, and simultaneously with technological and social progress, everything was considered possible. Koselleck writes: "Counsel is henceforth to be expected, not from the past, but from a future which has to be made" (2004b, p. 40). Experience is something that is present in the present, formed by traces in memory which can be brought to light at any given time. Just like expectations, experiences could be individual as well as collective; developed, formed, and sustained both in institutions and in people's private lives. It is important to note that experience and expectations are not equal and will never coincide. If they were, events would just be reproduced, and nothing new could be added to the world. Instead, the present always offers room for something unexpected; therefore, it is between the experienced and the expected that a new history is produced. However, the horizon of expectation is unreachable; it is constantly moving forward and impossible to gain knowledge about but, as human beings, we seem condemned to try. In relation to the concept of revolution, Koselleck writes that "[t]he social revolution must write off the past and create its substance out of the future" (2004c, p. 54). Experiences that have already been had could form hindrances to the possibility of envisaging something new, of imagining and dreaming about a different life

for the individual or society for the collective. This leads to experience-weighted prognosis rather than free-spirited visions. The point of departure here is that communicated concepts are indeed formed in experience, but they simultaneously contain visions about the future. Above all, this paper focuses on the potential of conceptions to express expectations of change and visions about a democratic society, with its point of departure in an educational context. Within this, focus is also directed towards the multiplicities and complexities with which the democratic society is often subscribed, partially using conceptual history in relation to both the form and content of the concept.

### The Concept of Democracy

#### Aim and Resistance: The Emergence of Popular Adult Education (Late Nineteenth Century)

Popular Adult Education<sup>3</sup> has its historical roots in the Reformation, but its popular breakthrough came during the nineteenth century (Korsgaard, 1997; Ödman, 1995). It is important to make a distinction between the broad definition of Popular Adult Education and the *Folkskola* (Elementary School), the latter of which was the result of the development of an established school system. These two traditions, *Folkskola* and Popular Adult Education, were characterized by two different epistemological approaches: the first according to an institutionally defined form of knowledge and the second considering the process as a source of knowledge. These different ways of approaching the goals of knowledge are important for the understanding of the following text and what it aims to show. When education through the Elementary School became mandatory in 1842, the Small Catechism was the primary teaching source of the established school system. As Isling (1980) shows, education in the established system was almost exclusively about Christianity. There were tight connections between the school and the church, as well as between the State and the church. This “functional” marriage forms an important condition and a point of departure for the movements behind Popular Adult Education, which can be seen as a reaction against the prevalent expertise-based manner of ruling where the power was concentrated in a very small group of people. Democracy became, at a very early stage, a subject of discussion in the emerging Swedish Popular Adult Education. In 1885, Herman Odhner, one of the key persons in the early movements, wrote in the newspaper of the Folk High Schools (*Folkhögskolebladet*):

With the increasing influence democracy has on general matters the importance of the enlightenment of people in general cannot be emphasized enough if, that is, we wish to look forward to the healthy and happy development of society (Degerman, 1967, p. 109).

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<sup>3</sup>The majority of the educational and cultural concepts described in this text in relation to *Folkbildning* (“bildung” of the people) have their linguistic points of departure in the concept of “the people,” as the text will show. Besides *Folkhögskola*, we also have *Folkuniversitet* (The University of the People), *Folkkyrka* (the Church of the People), *Folkrörelse* (the Peoples Movement), *Folkbibliotek* (The Library of the People), *Folkmusik* (the Music of the People), *Folkets park* (the Park of the People), *Folkets hus* (the House of the People), and so forth. The concept of democracy has obvious linkages to “people” (Democracy is Greek for “the rule of the people”), showing that these educational aims were no longer exclusively for the propertied, but also for the majority of the society: The common people.

The first form of organized Popular Adult Education in Sweden was introduced with inspiration from the Danish philosopher N. F. S. Grundtvig and the Folk High Schools (*Folkhögskola*) he had developed in 1844 (Korsgaard, 1997). Under the device “an education for life,” the conviction was that every human being has a spiritual vital force (Bergstedt, 1998). This universal force put not only the individual in focus but also the mind of the same, making it possible for everybody, regardless of social class, age, and so forth, to be formed (*bildung*) and educated to get new perspectives of life. If the established school was socializing people to live in accordance with a Christian belief, focus in the Folk High Schools was on society itself and on people as citizens of that society. In the 1860s, a new constitution for the Parliament and the municipalities was introduced, giving the peasants increased political influence. The emerging responsibilities that were thus placed upon the peasants demanded some kind of education and, in the southern parts of Sweden, leading peasants started to organize conditions for educational possibilities that were to follow on from the *Folkskola* (the Elementary School), something that eventually resulted in the Folk High Schools (Johansson, 1986; Vestlund, 1996). Some years later, in 1868, three Folk High Schools were introduced (Hvilan, Önnestad, and Herrestad), aiming to put an emphasis on the education of the citizens, but also to offer practical knowledge giving opportunities to improve the participants’ occupational skills.

During this time, some criticism was also directed towards the Folk High Schools and their supposed lack of interest in the engagement of “life and spirit” in the present. In a book written by Inge Johansson (1986), Alf Ahlberg argues that the Folk High Schools did not show sufficient awareness of the struggle for universal suffrage or the emerging democracy. Instead, hope was placed in the ability of the social movements to contribute with new forces to Popular Adult Education. The most influential social movements at the time were the Labor Movement, the Temperance Movement, and the Free Church Movement (Gustavsson, 1991; Johansson, 1986). Popular Adult Education became an important instrument for these social movements in their political struggle and, especially, provided great opportunities for exercising the practical dimensions of democracy (Arvidson, 1995; Gustavsson, 1991; Johansson, 1986; Sundgren, 1986; Vestlund, 1996), namely heading meetings, writing minutes, speaking, and respecting the opinions and decisions of others (Vestlund, 1996).

At first the fact that these social movements were organizing Folk High Schools raised concerns in some circles. The struggle between the Folk High Schools *Hola* and *Brunnsvik* became one of the most animated in the history of Popular Adult Education. In the debate that followed, *Hola* was accused of many things which were deemed to be dubious at the time, such as presenting socialistic propaganda, having an adverse opinion of Christianity, having a view of sexuality that was too advanced, and also having a lack of control over economic means (Vestlund, 1966). However, within the Labor Movement, the importance of Popular Adult Education for democracy was stressed at an early stage. In 1908 the Social Democrat Hjalmar Branting, who later became the prime minister of Sweden, commented at the party congress that it was the duty of the movement to “organize a planned work of enlightenment” (quoted in Arvidson, 1985, p. 68). The education of the citizens became the most important task of the Folk High School, which was seen as a school not only for the life of the individual, but for the life of the society. Through this school for the citizens, the aim was not only to provide the unique individual instruments to influence their own lives, but also to influence society (Gustavsson, 1991). In accordance with this, the following could be read in the first statute of the Folk High Schools signed by the King in 1919 (which was identical to the Folk High Schools paragraphs from 1906):

[Education should] give the students revival and insight such as will support their personal development and grant them a vivid perception of their responsibility as human beings and citizens (partially quoted in Degerman, 1967, p. 272).

When Popular Adult Education was evaluated for the first time at the beginning of the 1920s, its influence on democracy was stressed, as well as its ambition to give space to a multiplicity of opinions and perspectives under the concept of democracy in society:

The corollary of democracy is objectively the practical work to enlighten (Official Report of the Swedish Government, 1924: 5, p. 11).

For the experts, it is undeniably clear that not only would the work of Popular Adult Education benefit from getting new life and new strength but our cultural and political life would also be favored (Official Report of the Swedish Government, 1924: 5, pp. 12–13).

From the beginning of the twentieth century and for the two following decades, the Folk High Schools developed from being providers of education for peasants into schools for citizens, to which an increasing number of workers showed an interest in adhering. The amount of schools as well as the number of participants doubled. Simultaneously, the youth from the working classes who constituted the majority of students at the Folk High Schools at the time demanded democracy within their daily work, which led to the introduction of, for example, student councils. Regardless of ideology, Popular Adult Education as a movement was characterized by the same aim, namely that of encouraging democracy. Although the content of education was often practical, aiming to develop occupational skills, the education was primarily about teaching and practicing the core of democracy (Ingers & Hedlund, 1943). With the ambition of introducing a new system of norms in society, with justice and equal rights between different social groups in focus, democracy was the only way. Democracy was both the goal and the means in the Folk High Schools, and their pioneers were united by the conviction that education should be detached from the State. Broadly speaking, Popular Adult Education was a phenomenon of resistance to the State, and the development of the Folk High Schools in the late nineteenth century became one of the most obvious signs that this resistance was greatly supported among the general public. A change in the political climate was seen at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the government was challenged by Social Democrats and the Liberal Party (Vestlund, 1996). These new—in the Swedish context—parties undermined the role of the church. At the same time, the church was undergoing major internal conflicts, leaving space for the State to cooperate with new actors.

Despite the perhaps rather naïve conviction that the schools could flourish with the labor force and money of their students and teachers alone, it was not long before the Folk High Schools needed financial support. In 1872 the State granted them a small amount of money, and the resistance from within which the Folk High School had been born slowly started to crack (Bergstedt, 2000a; Vestlund, 1996). During the first decades of the twentieth century, educational initiatives from the social movements expanded. Apart from the Folk High Schools, study circles, meetings, and libraries were introduced in the name of these movements. The libraries in particular became physical meeting-places from which new knowledge arose (Arvidson, 1985). They were free and open for everybody and came to characterize the aims of these movements, in which education, knowledge, and democracy



were the nodes. For the Labor Movement, the People's Houses (*Folkets Hus*)<sup>4</sup> were of great importance; they were introduced, just like the libraries, in urban as well as rural areas. The beginning of the twentieth century was a politically interesting period in Swedish history in general, and in relation to democracy in particular. The new parties from the left increased their power; parliamentarism and universal suffrage were introduced. With the new national teaching plan in 1919, the church lost even more influence as the catechism was put aside (Isling, 1980). Even though these changes could be seen as achievements of democracy, this form of rule was still only regarded as one possible alternative.

### **Ideology in Power: Popular Adult Education Becomes Integrated (1946)**

As the Second World War paralyzed almost the whole of Europe, Sweden's outspoken aim of neutrality left it without major injury. Nonetheless, this period was of great importance for the social movements, which shaped opinions, as well as arranging meetings and campaigns concerning the war taking place in the rest of the world. In this way Popular Adult Education increased its power even further. As a Popular Adult Education commission stated in 1946, the work of Popular Adult Education should be "free and optional," a statement which clarified that it should continue to be detached from the state:

Popular Adult Education is free and optional. The freedom does not imply that the work of Popular Education should lack anchoring in the real needs of knowledge. ... It ... implies freedom in the sense of independence in relation to employers, donors, as well as denominational and political institutions. The optionality is one side of this freedom. It means that the education is carried by the people itself; it is a sign of its full authority (Official Report of the Swedish Government, 1946, p. 68).

According to the commission, the work of Popular Adult Education should be seen as a complement to the established school system and, as such, its most important role should be to participate in the socialization of democratic values (Vestlund, 1996).

The prerequisite of a real democratic state of mind is ultimately to be found in a more profound personality development. The most important task of education must be, as it often is stated, to meet and to fertilize the needs of the individual in this regard (Official Report of the Swedish Government, 1946, p. 68).

Based on this, among other things, a new constitution was introduced on 30 June 1947, and the social movements regarded these decisions as acknowledgement of a 50-year-long struggle. This victory of Popular Adult Education, and the ideas behind it, should be seen in the light of the discussion about democracy which followed in all of the countries involved in the Second World War. Suddenly, democracy was not only seen as an alternative path of ruling, but the only possible one. The Popular Adult Education Movement had, for half a century, struggled to set out exactly that path, and therefore became a crucial partner for the State not only to support, but also to cooperate with (Vestlund, 1996). The aim of the

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<sup>4</sup>*Folkets hus* (The House of the People) created important meeting places for the labor movements, both in relation to activities like study circles and courses and to the political work.

State was suddenly very similar to what Popular Adult Education had tried to accomplish through its education, namely to minimize the differences between social and economic groups in society. For the State, ruled by the Social Democrats, the most important task was to democratize welfare under the concept of *Folkhemmet* (People's home), which came to play an essential role at this time. It was not only education that became important, but also the setting up of prerequisites for social rights, healthcare, work, and decent living conditions in general. As Korsgaard (1999) sees it, the nation-state became the modern welfare state. Citizens were encouraged to participate in society and in political life, and in support of this aim Popular Adult Education and the social movements shaped important areas of socialization (Bergstedt, 2000b).

The aftermath of the Second World War had also had an impact on the steering documents of the established school systems, which changed both in rhetoric and in content during the decades that followed. In 1955, democracy as a concept was mentioned for the first time in the teaching plans of the established schools. This was done not in the general curriculum, but in relation to social studies and civics. The following was stated:

The teaching should contribute towards the strengthening of good standards for social life and towards fostering a will to cooperate, a sense of responsibility and respect for general regulations and agreements. It should, moreover, aim to awaken an understanding of the common fundamental values in our Swedish democratic society, develop an interest for societal concerns and a habit of critically and independently judging descriptions and statements in general questions thus encouraging the pupil's development towards being an active judicious and responsible citizen in a free country (Teaching plan 1955, 1955, p. 102).

This concept had an even more important role in the first curriculum introduced in the comprehensive school in 1962:

A democratic society must be formed by free and independent human-beings. However, freedom and independence cannot be ends in themselves: they must rather form the basis of cooperation and interaction. The socialization that takes place in school should therefore lay the foundations and further develop such characteristic among the pupils which, in a time of intense development, can carry and strengthen the principles of democracy, namely tolerance, cooperation and equality between sexes, nations and ethnic groups (General Aims in Curriculum, 1962, p. 18).

Education in general, and the subject of social studies and civics in particular, shaped opportunities to challenge the mechanisms behind the Second World War and also to discuss what could be achieved with the instruments offered by democracy. As Englund (1986) shows, democracy became the ideal in the established school system during this period. Students were suddenly fostered to become citizens and active participants in society. Democracy as an emphasized value has pervaded the curricula that followed from 1962 up until today.

The period after the Second World War was undeniably a successful one for the ideologies behind Popular Adult Education. However, at the same time that the State gave these movements mandates to exert an influence, there was what could be seen as a favor expected in return (Vestlund, 1996). Bridges were built between the Folk High Schools and the established school system, aiming to make the systems more compatible.

However, the Folk High Schools could continue with their grade- and syllabus-free pedagogy. The Folk High Schools, having support from a broad spectrum of people, continued to attract students from all strata in society and expressed a certain responsibility to provide alternatives for people who did not fit into the mainstream school system.

### **A Supported Force: Lifelong Education in a New Light (the 1970s)**

In the 1970s, the social movements behind Popular Adult Education were for the first time exposed to competition, when a general adult education system began to take form. This change had clear connections to a societal vision about the need for “lifelong education.” In this, the development of competencies was put into focus, with a clear connection to the labor market. Instability of the labor market followed as the industrial society slowly changed to a more knowledge-based society, forcing people not only to acquire an education, but also to re-educate themselves. Education became the main instrument for staying attractive in the flexible labor market. With this shift, adult education in general became directed towards individuals and their needs more strongly and in a way that differed from previous times. In the 1970s, UNESCO declared the importance of lifelong education (Faure, 1972; Korsgaard, 1999):

Ensuring that people will be fully able to exercise their democratic rights in education also means guaranteeing their right to participate in the management of their educational establishment and in the definition of its policies (Faure et al., 1972, p. 78).

There is no such thing as a separate ‘permanent’ part of education which is not life-long. In other words, lifelong education is not an educational system but the principle on which the over-all organisation of a system is founded, and which should accordingly underlie the development of each of its component parts (Faure et al., 1972, p. 182).

At first sight, this development could be seen to be in favor of Popular Adult Education, but that was not the case. Lifelong education has been regarded as an adaption to the market, in which the individual is seen more as a worker or a customer than as a citizen. This was clearly not compatible with the ideologies which lay behind the initiatives of Popular Adult Education. Simultaneously, it put the most important values, with democracy as the keystone, in the shade. This development was not against democratic ideals, but neither did it imply the dedication of special attention to developing and securing them. The seed of a potential problem was now sown in the soil, but it did not become a threat until some decades later (Bergstedt & Helmstad, 2003).

Significant for this period of time in the history of Popular Adult Education are the somewhat new conditions that followed for the Folk High Schools. At the beginning of the 1970s, the occupational schools (*yrkesskolan* and *fackskolan*) consolidated into the upper secondary school (*gymnasiet*). As a result of this, more than 90% of youth was involved in the new order (Vestlund, 1996). Simultaneously with the changes made on this front, a new kind of adult education arose with the introduction of Municipal Adult Education (*Komvux*) and Adult Education at Compulsory School level (*Grundvux*). Suddenly, the Popular Adult Education Folk High Schools were no longer the only actors in the market of adult schooling, and a competition of the like never seen before was formed. The inevitable problem with recruitment which followed resulted in changes in

relation to the content and structure of the Folk High Schools. In order to meet the expected needs, the number of aesthetic programs increased. At the same time, opportunities to switch from the Folk High Schools to the established school system increased as the respective systems became even more compatible. A special quota was dedicated which made it possible for people who had studied for at least two years at a Folk High School to apply for further study at university college (Vestlund, 1996). This was the real beginning of an organizational and administrative consolidation which the increasingly converging horizons of expectations were shaping.

### **Loss of Resistance: Diluted, Unified, and Established (Today)**

As shown above, major changes were made in the market of adult education. The Folk High Schools became more like alternatives to the mainstream than the obvious choice for the adult searching to be educated or re-educated. The Folk High Schools were by no means struck off the list, but they were undeniably out in the shade. In order to fulfil needs and find solutions to the problems, a special board was constituted, namely the Commission of Popular Adult Education (*Folkbildningsrådet*). Representatives from the different associations working with Popular Adult Education were appointed (Richardson, 1999). In 1991 new reforms of Popular Adult Education were set out, in which the fear of a decreased base of recruits was expressed (Richardson, 1999). In the conditions of the granting of the state the following is stressed about what Popular Adult Education should aim for:

1. Support activities which contribute towards the strengthening and development of democracy
2. Contribute towards making it possible for people to influence their own life situations and towards creating an interest for participation in the development of society
3. Contribute towards the closing of the educational gaps and increasing the educational level in society (The Constitution of Popular Adult Education, 1991, p. 977).

These formulations are used in the prevalent documents from the Ministry of Education. It is interesting to note that even though the organizations behind Popular Adult Education have the mandate to govern their money themselves, their activities are evaluated by objectives made by the State. They are free to use the pedagogy and the content found most useful, as long as the goals formulated by the State are reached. The following was stated on the Swedish government's website in relation to its work for democracy:

The goal of the politics of democracy is to create conditions for a dynamic democracy in which the individual's possibilities of having an influence are strong and in which human rights are respected. [...] The most important tasks of the government are therefore to strengthen and defend the democracy ([www.government.se](http://www.government.se), 2012).

The above quotations show clear similarities between what Popular Adult Education is expected to do and the government's definition of democracy. The resistance which Popular Adult Education had represented for decades had gradually been weakened, concurrent with the State's integration in its ambitions of visions of forming a democratic society. Popular Adult Education failed to renew itself when new actors were emerging in the market, and its unique resistance was lost.

### **Conclusion: Democracy as a Shared Value—Concepts Unite**

Democracy has been a self-evident key concept for Popular Adult Education and a cornerstone in its activities. As a guiding principle for content, democracy was not only something about which to have visions and for which to aim; it also had an obvious influence on the practical day-to-day educational situation (Arvidson, 1985; Bergstedt, 2000b; Gustavsson, 1991). At the end of the nineteenth century, democracy represented something completely different in relation to the prevailing governance methods of the State, in which power and influence were inherited. To use the concept of democracy and to practice it constituted an explicit as well as implicit resistance to the prevalent system. The expressed horizons of expectation (Koselleck, 2002; 2004d) showed the general public that something different was possible: Another society could be formed. When these social movements in general, and that of Popular Adult Education in particular, put pressure on the state, great democratic achievements were accomplished. These movements formed a pregnant resistance, a clear opposition which in itself created a democratic situation never before seen in a Swedish context. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Swedish state made some important moves towards becoming a more democratic society, but the concept itself remained nonetheless mainly in the hands of the social movements. After the events of the Second World War, democracy became an obvious concept to use not only in the Social Democratic State but also in other political parties. When democracy was mentioned for the first time in the school steering documents in 1955, it became obvious that the concept which the Popular Adult Education Movement had used and aimed for over the course of decades had been incorporated in the visions of the State and the formal educational institutions. Society as a whole suddenly gave expression to sharing the same values and visions as had historically been held by the resistance movements. Seen from the point of departure of conceptual history, it was through the horizon of expectation expressed within the temporalization of the concept of democracy that these parts were united. When the concept of democracy pervaded the rhetoric of society, it could without doubt be seen as a victory for the social movements; they had convinced the ruling parties that democracy was the governing form above all. It is important to note that not only did they unite under the vision of a democratic society; more interestingly, they did so under the conviction that education was *the* instrument which would make this democracy possible to accomplish. It is primarily the history after this achievement upon which the following will concentrate.

### **Shared Definitions: Common Horizons of Expectations**

When the ideas and visions of Popular Adult Education were adopted by the State in the late twentieth century, the movement created by resistance to the prevailing government became itself a part of the established power. An original source of anger and a conservative actor to be fought against had gradually become a partner with whom to cooperate. The framework of the struggle of the movement had changed and the fundamentals of its activity started to shake, which resulted in the constraint of its uniqueness. Alongside with this, the progressive pedagogy, with clear emphasis on democratic methods, which Popular Adult Education had been using was to some extent incorporated in the established school system. This could partly be seen as a condition of the acknowledgement earned internationally by the Swedish school system at the time. Democracy as a concept was now on everybody's lips and was used in the daily rhetoric of almost all of the political parties.

Simultaneously, democracy as a concept started to change character, moving from something to aim for to become a pre-condition, something to shelter, strengthen, and defend. Even though the aim of Popular Adult Education, unlike that of the State, has been stated as the development of democracy (as is shown by the quotation above), its role turned out rather to be an administrative one (Johansson, 1986; Vestlund, 1996). The concept of democracy became incorporated in a visionless language in which democracy did not constitute an aim but a clearly defined goal, with a definition which had already been reached. The success of Popular Adult Education was that it managed to put this important concept on the agenda, as well as to introduce education as an instrument to spread its content and form. When it became acknowledged by the establishment, the movement lost its power to influence the meaning and significance of the concept. Popular Adult Education became disarmed, and failed to renew the meaning of the concept; alternatively, no replacement to it was found in order to maintain a fruitful position in opposition. Drawing on the thoughts of Koselleck, the struggle between these two different actors' interpretations of the concept was lost, resulting in the tension between the State and Popular Adult Education and the tension within the concept itself, which had made it a key concept, also being lost.

### **A Collective Singular: Reduction of Diversity**

The ideals behind Popular Adult Education sought explicitly to encourage a diversity of learning situations, not only as a resistance to the institutionalized established school system but also with regards to their own content. Without a decisive syllabus, the participants of the Folk High Schools were enabled to influence both the content and the form of the education (Ambjörnsson, 1988). Diversified as such, the associations behind these different social movements (for example workers', temperance, or Free Church movements) had the ability to represent and meet the needs of large groups in society, especially in terms of pedagogy. Popular Adult Education has always been expressed in singular, referring to what could be seen as a never-ending project with clear, but nonetheless verified, visions about the future. The concept has in its essence to be seen as a comprehensive greatness yet vivid in its clearly expressed and constantly present visions, forming something that could be seen as a contrast to the conceptual history-view of the collective singular. Popular Adult Education was simultaneously a vision in itself, and an expression of the importance of having visions. However, when these visions united with those of the established plural societies, the power of the imagined future became severely constrained. At the same time as it united, it somehow converged into the expression of there being only one thing to strive for, only one democratic vision. The manifold, not linguistically but content-wise, expressed in the visions about society, became as comprehensive and singular as the concept itself through being incorporated in the vision of the established society. As an obvious result, the manifoldness of the content was lost and Popular Adult Education became as unified and singular as its grammatical form, which happened in accordance with the theories of conceptual history of the formation of a collective singular (Jordheim, 2003; Koselleck, 2002). In the case of the concept of democracy in the Swedish educational context, it is obvious that a key concept can be an indicator for change as well as a factor of change, but also a potential danger for an activity when losing its complexity and when failing to renew itself.

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