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Reflections on the relationship between schools and the city

"Welcome to jail!" read the words on a large, red banner in front of the gateway to the Herman-Hesse-Gymnasium high school in Berlin. After the autumn holidays (2000), several activists from the children's rights group K.R.Ä.T.Z.Ä. were demonstrating in front of the entrances to some Berlin schools. They were handing out leaflets designed to show the structural similarities between schools and prisons, from the strictly controlled daily schedule and "surveillance of people's private business" to the "barren, gloomy" architecture and compulsory schooling as a "day release" system. The protest was 14 years ago. Today, the topic is becoming a suitable theme for talk shows, if under other headings: the philosopher David Precht (2013), in his book about "Anna", the director Erwin Wagenhofer (2013), in his film "Alphabet", and the neural researcher Gerald Hüther (undated), in his lectures, have brought the fundamental criticism of the school as an institution up to date.

This is not the place to hold the necessary debate on the basic principles of whether the German school system, in its current form, is still fit for the twenty-first century. In the medium term, at least, millions of euros are likely to be spent continuing to renovate and sometimes even build school buildings in Germany. However, it is this provocative comparison with a prison which leads to the key issue raised in this article: how is it possible, at least, to keep the school gates open? The comparison made by K.R.Ä.T.Z.Ä. suggests that it is a physically and socially hermetically sealed system. Certainly, in the past, there have been ways of looking at schools which might suggest a parallel of this kind: the school as a cocoon, as a carefully prepared "pedagogical suburb", on the sidelines, with borders that are mainly sealed off. In the Western world, schools have doubtless also always been a kind of safety net, ensuring that children and young people do not come to harm, or cause any harm, while their parents are at work all day. The strong link between compulsory schooling and supervisory duties in Germany are a clear sign of this. Over recent decades, however, this image has fundamentally changed. Proposition 10 of the Montag Foundations' handbook on the basics of "School planning and building" (2011, p. 64ff.) says: "The school opens up to the city – the city opens up to the school". In many German schools the gates now deliberately remain open – at least at certain times, and sometimes for long periods of time. Pupils go out and come back in; external experts are welcome to visit for specific projects. The older the pupils are, the more frequently they cross the threshold. Back in 197I, in his programme "Deschooling Society", a critical discourse on civilisation, Ivan Illich (2013) even called for the barrier to schooling which the city itself erects to be raised entirely. However, in Germany at least, this radical concept remains a utopia.

Instead, Barbara Riekmann (2014), a former head of the German Schools Award-winning "Max Brauer Schule" (Hamburg), describes the touch point between the school and the district as a "cell membrane" which lets through some substances, but not others. This selective permeability is, however, what keeps the independent, yet dependent, cell alive. Different qualities and quantities of matter flow in either direction.

The gateway is open into the school

Let us begin by describing permeability from outside into the school. This permeability can be observed in all kinds of functional contexts. For this reason, when terms such as "educational landscape", "district school", "community education" etc. are used, it is important to check what kind of context is meant.

Version 1: shared use

The first case involves opening up the school building to users from outside the school: sports clubs, music schools, children's art academies, and so on. School pupils being able to take part in the activities they offer is just a side effect, if, ideally, a useful one. The main point, before anything else, is the economic synergy gained from shared use. Rooms which were once left empty during the afternoon or evening are given an additional use. After all, classrooms are usually only used by the school between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m., five days a week during the school term. Often they are used for far less time. When they can be put to use by other partners during the evening, at weekends and in the school holidays, this can save a great deal of money from the public purse. The side-effect (school pupils taking part) can, however, also be planned to deliberately raise the school's profile. The school then becomes a real cultural "magnet", creating an energy which, in turn, spreads into the school day in many ways, for example if the assembly hall (or the foyer, with additional furnishings) is turned into a public theatre stage, a forum for discussion on municipal policy, a presentation area for art exhibitions, and much more.

Below is a list of the most common types of cooperative venture found in Germany (see Table 1). This is not a definitive list, as in principle there are no limits – and no individual school will open up its rooms at random to all these partners: the kinds of cooperation vary depending on the school profile and surrounding environment.

Table 1: School partnerships in Germany

Part of school building	Shared user
Sports facilities	Sports club
Assembly hall / foyer	Various performances, presentations, exhibitions
Library	Community library
School playground / play equipment	Neighbourhood
Cafeteria	Neighbourhood
Classrooms and special-purpose rooms	Evening school, lessons for parents, language courses
Administration areas	Municipal advice offices
Common rooms	Youth association
Music rooms / assembly hall	Music school
…	…

Source: own representation

Here, mention should also be made of purposefully planned, immediate "neighbourhoods", ranging from the "school on the roof" of a shopping centre (providing

space to build a school in a city-centre location with few available plots, such as the Bundesrealgymnasium an der Au, Innsbruck) to an old folks' centre (enabling the generations to come together, e.g. at the Geschwister-Scholl-Stadtteilschule, Hamburg).

Version 2: the school as a community centre; the community centre as a school
In the second case, several institutions from outside the school move into their own rooms within the school, or at least in the direct neighbourhood (or the school moves in with them). This applies not only to town libraries (of which there are plenty of examples in Germany) but also to all kinds of social and cultural institutions which are of great importance both for the children and young people as they grow up and for the community as a whole, without themselves being part of the school. The Netherlands provide some examples of this model: "At the [...] Brede School (in the Dutch municipality of Vaals – author's note) the primary school is at the heart of a network of day-care and advice services for parents and children aged 0 to 12. There are a good 500 schools of this kind (in the Netherlands – author's note), and every year the figure rises... For this reason, the extensive building complex also includes, for example, the town library, the public health department, the Green Cross and the youth welfare services, as well as the Vaals Foundation for child and youth art education, etc. Close contact between day-care providers and teachers, and the proximity to social institutions providing support when problems arise are designed to provide the best possible forms of care and education for children. Their parents also benefit from having just one place to go for the school, day-care and visiting doctors [...]. In the Netherlands, the Green Cross is responsible for medical care for pre-schoolers and schoolchildren; as it also provides residential care for senior citizens, the Vaals concept in fact includes an intergenerational centre" (Tyroller, 2006).

Spatial requirements for opening up the school

For versions 1 and 2 to take place - shared use and the school as a community centre - certain spatial conditions need to be met at the point where the school and public use come together. This is the only way for the "membrane" to maintain the right balance of permeability, with no "clogging" or "holes" appearing.

- Accessible areas separated into those for public use, on one hand, and for school use, on the other. (The schoolchildren's main base, with sensitive school teaching materials and children's work, needs to be able to stay out of bounds.)
- Access to sanitary facilities from public areas
- Lockers in the public areas
- Separate heating and electricity circuits (with their own fuse boxes) for public rooms used in the evening or during the holidays
- Sufficient number of parking spaces within reach
- Signage outside and inside the school
- School playground secured at night

With an eye to public acceptance, another element which should not be forgotten is the school's appearance in terms of architecture and attractiveness, e.g. an inviting entrance, outward transparency. A "prison effect" would indeed not be of benefit.

Version 3: external experts from the district in lessons
This version does not have a spatial effect. Here, the emphasis is on immediate pedagogical use for school pupils. It is about people from the city district (and beyond), from "real life", being invited to the school for specific purposes to take part in certain lessons or temporary projects as discussion partners, experts, fellow learners or

reviewers: politicians coming to panel discussions, beekeepers coming for a project on bees, actors judging the reading competition, etc.

The gateway is open out of the school

The "cell membrane" is selectively permeable in both directions. In modern schools, the gateway is open for schoolchildren to leave it for limited periods of time.

Version 4: educational landscape
The term currently used for Version 4 is that of an "educational landscape", of which the school is a part, along with other institutions. However, this term means more than just an alliance of different institutions which come together to agree on the focuses of their work. Deliberately opening up the school to the outside world actively connects pupils with other lifeworlds, preparing them for transitions which come later, when they leave school. As long ago as the 1980s there was intense discussion about the Anglo-American concept of the community school (see Zimmer & Niggemeyer, 1992; Buhren, 1997), then frequently linked to far-reaching political visions of being able to balance out social disadvantages directly through school structures. The political, moral charge of this concept has today largely settled down. Instead, the introduction of *Ganztagsschulen*, which offer extracurricular educational activities, extending the German school day, has given new meaning to extracurricular areas. After all, it would be expecting too much of schools (or schools would be overestimating their own abilities) and would cause a problem if schools offering all-day activities were expected (or wanted) to take over all the fields which were once available for children more or less to pick and choose during the afternoon.
A community school is thus about more than a trip to a nearby museum or the shared use of facilities, e.g. those at a neighbouring sports club or public swimming pool. It is about specific experiences of active contact with other areas of social and cultural life. Two examples:
Example 1: for years, the Baumschulenweg primary school in Bremen has been carrying out a series of projects in its playground in the middle of the city: the "chicken class" take care of a little chicken run; the "bee class" look after an apiary with three swarms, and the "herb class" tend a kitchen garden. In itself nothing unusual. There are plenty of versions of this type of project. The difference in our context is that on Saturdays, the children put up a little stand at the adjacent weekly market, where they sell their honey, eggs and herbs. The primary schoolers learn far more than just applied mathematics when they count their earnings; they learn a great deal that is not on the curriculum, but is important for life.
Example 2: Schule Schloss Salem (see Seydel, 1995), upper secondary course in philosophy, Year 12 (German system). A lesson is taking place on the reasonings behind ethical systems; hedonism versus deontology, with a presentation by the teacher, a worksheet and discussion. The conversation strays to levels of abstraction which only the class's three non-stop talkers can follow. Suddenly, there is a beep at a desk near the window. One of the schoolchildren jumps up, grabs the beeper lying on the desk and rushes out of the classroom. A door slams in the neighbouring classroom, too. Shortly afterwards, the sirens of the school fire brigade start to wail. Later, at lunch in the boarding school's dining hall, there is a report: this time it was "just" a 500m-long oil leak on the B31 near the spot where drinking water comes from Lake Constance; they secured the area along with the Überling fire service.

A school having its own fire brigade which is part of the local fire services is surely the exception in Germany. The first example, too, is in some ways an ideal situation. Other examples of schoolchildren actively taking part in municipal life were collected during the "Democratic Action" competition (2014). Behind these examples lies the principle that a school only earns the title "community school" if schoolchildren can gain their own experience, in the school context, of coming into contact with other areas of social and cultural life. Such occasions are not a one-off flash in the pan, but are a permanent part of the school curriculum. In order for them to gain this experience, the "pedagogical encircling of childhood" which threatens to go hand in hand with the widespread introduction of the *Ganztagsschule*, especially, needs to be put to an end (see Lindenberg, 2013). The aim is active, responsible participation in community life with far-reaching consequences. This calls for stepping stones leading children out of the school (see Table 2).

Table 2: stepping stones into an educational landscape

Buildings in the neighbourhood	Shared users from the school
Sports facilities	Sports lessons, working groups
Municipal hall / community centre	School council
Library	Research, reading tasks
Public park	Playground for breaks
Snack stand	Snacks during breaks
Workshops and industrial plants	Work experience
Social institutions	Work experience
Youth association	After-school activities
Music school	Instrument practice, concerts
Museum	Art or history projects
Cinema	German or history projects
Theatre	German or history projects
Zoo	Biology project
Red Cross, relief organisation	School first-aiders, etc.
Church / Room of Peace	Meditation etc.
Municipal forest	Biology / tending plants
…	…

Source: own representation, based on Schneider (2014)

Other collections of examples of specific cooperative projects can be found, among other things, in publications by the Deutsche Kinder- und Jugendstiftung (2007); Landesinstitut für Lehrerbildung und Schulentwicklung Hamburg (2007); city district cooperation: nelecom (no date). The partners a school works with should be built up carefully depending on its profile to ensure that the cooperation results in more than just a brief encounter.

Challenges and barriers for cooperation

Opening doors, paving the way and bringing actors physically close does not in itself produce cooperation. In a block of flats, people may live cheek by jowl, but remain anonymous, with no relationship to one another. The lists compiled here are as yet no more than the rows of buzzers by the door of a block of flats.

The same applies to schools: an evening school using the school building in the evening often has as little to do with the school itself as a shift worker using the "hot bed" system of the nineteenth century, where night workers would pay tenants to use their bed during the day when they did not need it, to make up for the high cost of rent. It is only when shared interests are found, and shared rules and rituals allow partners to act together, following an aim, that a shared physical space becomes a social space.

What barriers can hamper or even prevent cooperation between the school and partners outside the school, and what bridges can make it easier? To begin with, it must be said that frictional losses are inevitable, even ignoring unfavourable technical or spatial aspects (if there is no clear definition of the borders between public and non-public spaces) and ignoring communication barriers (lack of consultation, last-minute changes to requirements, etc.). Even ignoring these self-generated communication barriers, competition and conflicts of use appear normal considering the way social systems develop of their own accord.

- Different goals. Experience with school centres, which are specifically designed to be cooperative institutions, shows that a shared site does not by any means automatically lead to cooperation between the schools sharing the site (or even a building), even though the goals, habits, professions etc. inherent to a school centre are relatively similar. When, for example, a school and a youth centre are direct neighbours, their goals, habits and professions are often fundamentally different. With qualifications in mind, the school aims to convey a specific content in a planned manner, and is very generally focused on selection. How successful their education is can be measured by a comparitive marking system. Schools are largely driven by formal learning processes. The youth centre focuses primarily on the young people themselves, their interests and individual potential for development; by no means on comparative assessment (except, at most, in playful competition). Community youth work is largely shaped by informal learning processes (see Deinet & Icking, 2013).
- Natural borders. A social system takes on a lasting form when it defines its borders. This is done by means of rituals and rules, and – if there is a territorial attachment – by delimiting spaces. The habits formed by groups of schoolchildren in "their" class means that they "take possession of" their classroom in a different way, for example, to the staircases. This typically comes to light when there is conflict about orderliness. Errors made by "insiders" are tolerated in a different way to those made by "outsiders". If your own group at school leaves their room messy or dirty, this raises a ruckus, but not usually as bad a ruckus as if the user who left it in chaos is from outside the school. This applies both on a small scale, to a class, and to the school as a whole.
- Lack of time and resources. Educational institutions, at school or elsewhere, always run the risk of eating up staff members' time like a black hole. Educational processes are never-ending (except, for example, at the end of the school year, and even then it is usually only temporarily). Some things always stay open-ended, both in terms of relationships and on a factual level. In schools in difficult situations, especially, the school's core business always demands a great deal of energy from teachers and other staff. In this light, spontaneous resistance to

extra demands arising from the city district take on an appearance of legitimate self-defence.

Conditions for success

Readers might now come to the conclusion that, apart from the savings made on initial investment and running costs, opening up the school to the city district for educational purposes and sharing the use of a school building mainly produces friction and only little educational synergy, if any. And indeed, this lack of productivity does sometimes occur. Yet there are proven examples of productive relationships between the city and the school, in which the above difficulties are overcome or never appear in the first place. Three important conditions for success are:

- Resilient communication structures are set up within the city district; routines for regular two-way exchange of information, crisis management, joint planning and careful consideration of future steps. To this end, a network needs to be created in the city district linking the groups of actors involved (see Bertelsmann, 2006). Generally, the education conference (or similar system) which this entails needs a "caretaker" to ensure that information is exchanged. This might be the school director, or some other actor within or outside the school.
- A district education conference does not in itself make a community school. As well as the "caretaker" for the network in the city district as a whole, there are individual "border-crossers" moving between the institutions: a teacher or member of the pedagogical staff who, for example, is a member of the Red Cross and comes in and out of the Red Cross centre, will be able to keep up the school first-aiders' connection with the world outside the school in a very different way to when the office is only organised internally.
- Cooperative requirements should not be too great a burden. One partner should not be expected to solve the other partner's key problems: there are clearly defined shared interests, but they fall within certain limits. This is necessary to create a real win-win situation for all involved: the sports association using the hall extends its programme to include the after-school activities. The drama educationalist taking up some of the German teacher's responsibilities on a project gets a stage in the community centre, etc.
- The relationship between the partners is eye to eye, despite any objective differences, and each shows clear respect for the other's task. A "subtenancy contract" emphasising one side's dependency, is not of benefit. The work carried out by the social pedagogues at the next-door youth centre is different to that done by the Maths teacher, but just as valuable. From the point of view of the social pedagogue, the school should not be stylised as the enemy, even reading "between the lines". Otherwise this wastes the opportunities which lie in the two institutions' spatial proximity.

Outlook

There is a great deal of speculation about the future of schools in the Internet Age, revolving around the key phrase "delocalising education". If the speculation behind this phrase turned out to be true, this would indeed have considerable effects on the relationship between the school and the city district. One thing is true: the basic blueprint for old-school lessons (and with it our image of the rooms in a school building) was developed at a time when there were no computers or televisions, no Wikipedia or

YouTube. After their parents, children's teachers were the second key to the worlds outside their direct field of experience. That changed radically with the advent of the modern media. The school (and church) have lost their erstwhile monopoly on explaining the world. The computer industry is promising that the world's knowledge will soon even be available on your wrist, in the form of an iWatch, or in front of your eyes, with Google Glass. It is true that the new media bring with them a fundamental change in the role of the teacher. Teachers will never be able to achieve the perfect stage-management of television films or computer simulations. But it is probably wrong to assert that this will render the school, as a real place, superfluous in the foreseeable future. After all, the more perfect virtual worlds become, the more important the example set by the teacher in person in selecting from and interpreting those worlds. Information provided on the Internet is not enough on its own: it needs instructions to understand it. The new media may make it possible for schoolchildren to have important experiences, but they are, after all, only secondary, not primary experiences: coming face to face with people and things in person. These encounters are necessary for – if the term can be permitted – "real" education. This is especially the case if, in the near future, modern media and e-learning leads to the partial delocalisation of education processes, to a far greater extent than is currently imaginable. There are already signs of a process of this kind taking place today at American universities, and it is likely to reach German schools, too, in the not-too-distant future. However, real physical spaces for face-to-face encounters with people and objects will (necessarily) continue to exist in future. The younger that children and adolescents are, the more they need a defined, specific place where they can feel at home. And whose gateways are sometimes closed.

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