Culture without education?
Some questions to New Cultural Geography
Peter Meusburger

1 Relations between culture and education
2 Schools as arenas of cultural conflicts and as instruments of cultural policies
3 Mechanisms of the school system that affect the cultures and identities of ethnic minorities
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   3.3 Size and location of schools
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Culture and education are closely interwoven

Culture
- aspirations
- ways of learning
- schemes of interpretation
- attitudes towards education
- collective memories

Education
- scientific knowledge
- symbolic knowledge
- cultural identities, ethnic awareness
- transmits culture from one generation to the next

- „a capacity for social action“ (Stehr 1994)
- influences perception, decision making, actions, and careers of persons
- influences the competitiveness of social systems
All concepts of culture are intrinsically linked to learning and knowledge

- **behavioural conception**
  - defines culture as patterns of behaviour that are **learned** and passed on from generation to generation

- **symbolic conception**
  - considers culture as the categories, **experiences**, **epistemologies**, **beliefs**, and **doctrines** that organize, rationalize, and justify a distinct way of life

- **C. Geertz (1973)**
  - the culture concept “denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their **knowledge** about and attitudes towards life”

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All concepts of culture are intrinsically linked to learning and knowledge

- **C. D’Andrade (1984)**
  - culture is a “**learned** systems of meanings, communicated by means of natural language and other symbol systems, having representational, directive and affective functions, and capable of creating cultural entities and particular senses of reality”

- **UNESCO**
  - culture is “a dynamic value system of **learned** elements, with assumptions, conventions, beliefs and rules permitting members of a group to relate to each other and to the world, to communicate and to develop their creative potential”
Relations between culture and behaviour

Epistemological cultural relativism claims that
- culture determines what we know and how we know.
- reality is perceived through the spectacles of culture.
- all human experience of the physical world as well as of society is culturally mediated.
- all perceptions, evaluations, and judgements are a function of the cultural system to which one belongs

Most authors agree that culture does not determine behaviour

Being rooted in a culture does not mean immunity against new ideas, norms, or practices

- The concept of culture
  - does not imply the absence of debate
  - does not imply a homogeneity in cultural consciousness or practice within an ethnic group.
- members of ethnic groups continuously borrow and adopt new cultural forms and alter their identities through contact-induced learning.
  - Each ethnic group has its internal differentiation, inequalities, and conflicts, its elites and subcultures.
  - Culture is not a stable system, but a process and place in constant motion, where meaning and situated identities connected to ethnicity, language, or religion are created and performed (see Bellwood 2001).
Is it possible to conceive culture while neglecting systems of education?

how are culture and knowledge produced and transmitted between generations?

Who tries where to control or influence these learning processes?

how are these learning processes influenced by spatial contexts

Why should cultural geography deal with educational systems?

- Cultural geography should ask
  - how culture and various categories of knowledge are produced, diffused in space, and transmitted between generations
  - how these learning processes are influenced by spatial contexts
  - which institutions try to control or influence these learning processes

- The school system is one of the most important institutions where forced assimilation and internal cultural colonialism takes place
  - It is one of the most important arenas where ethnic conflicts are fought out
  - In a large number of countries the school system was used to support or destroy ethnic awareness and cultural practices of minorities.
  - Teachers, schools, universities and libraries belong to the most important agents of culture
  - The treatment of ethnic minorities in the school system and their educational achievement are a fine seismograph for their vulnerability and the degree of cultural hegemony they are exposed to
an education- and knowledge-oriented approach can be applied to almost all topics of (new) cultural geography.

Schools are arenas of cultural conflicts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>state power</th>
<th>dominating culture</th>
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<tr>
<td>different systems of symbolic knowledge</td>
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<td>ethnic minorities</td>
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<th>the school system is supposed to support</th>
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<tr>
<td>cultural homogeneity of the nation state</td>
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<td>national identity</td>
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<td>assimilation of ethnic minorities</td>
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<td>monolingual compulsory schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>the „truths“ and collective memories of those in power</td>
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<tr>
<td>concepts of universalism and egalitarianism</td>
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<tr>
<td>cultural diversity, cultural autonomy of minorities</td>
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<td>regional or ethnic identities</td>
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<td>maintenance of the minority's cultural heritage</td>
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<td>minority language as language of instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>the „truths“ and collective memories of the minorities</td>
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<td>concepts of cultural relativism</td>
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Environmental approach
Forced assimilation of minorities via the school system

Cultural egalitarianism
- denies that any real difference between ethnic groups or cultures exist
- ethnic minorities should become assimilated
- autonomy in the field of education is regarded as reactionary, anti-modern, and as a threat to national unity
- description of cultural differences and tolerance of cultural rights will lead to conflicts and undermine the unity of the state

Cultural relativism
- recognition and appreciation of cultural differences is a moral act, a human right, and a basic element to avoid ethnic conflicts.
- If culture is intrinsically linked to the formation of identity, then any general notion of individual or group rights requires that culture is protected
- Minorities should be allowed their own elementary schools

Both concepts can be misused

Imperialism, colonialism, discrimination of minorities
Nationalism, racism
What happens when minority children are exposed to forced assimilation, when they are not allowed to use their mother tongue and when their culture, their value system and their way of life runs against the cultural norms and values of the dominant group?

Reactions of parents
- They are likely to view the school with hostility and distrust
- They may be reluctant to foster attitudes and behaviour patterns that will promote their children’s educational success

Reactions of students
- They may demonstrate low skills, low morale, low aspirations and high resentment, which then become causes or justifications for further discrimination in school and labour market.
- They may be ashamed of their culture and may alienate themselves from their parents,
- or they no longer identify with the school system and develop strategies of resistance against the rules and goals of the school

counter-school subculture
marked by truancy, high proportions of dropouts, unwillingness to study, rebuff of “acting white”

„Context of living“ versus „Context of learning“

- A counter-school culture will re-enforce the negative stereotypes already attached to this group by the majority.
- Even if minority parents agree to cultural assimilation, their children will often fail to do well in school because they were socialized in a way which does not fit the cultural expectations in school.
- When the context of learning is consistent with the context of living and with students’ cultural background, ethnic minority children show improvements in
  - achievement,
  - memory
  - problem-solving abilities

Main elements of the context of learning are
- Location of schools
- Language of instruction
- Ethnic and social origin of teachers
### Educational achievement of Hungarian gypsies over 14 years old 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational level</th>
<th>male gypsies</th>
<th>female gypsies</th>
<th>gypsies total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not attend or complete 8 grades of primary school</td>
<td>45.86</td>
<td>64.01</td>
<td>54.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>46.17</td>
<td>33.29</td>
<td>39.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical school or vocational school</td>
<td>6.94</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>4.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University or Academy</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hungarian Census 1990, Meusburger 2001

### Proportion of Hungarian Gypsies over 14 years old who did not complete eight grades of primary school (1990)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of inhabitants in place of residence</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 500</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>72.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>501 – 1.000</td>
<td>59.7</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>68.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.001 – 2.000</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>64.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.001 – 5.000</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>66.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.001 – 10.000</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.001 – 20.000</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>66.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.001 – 100.000</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>62.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100.001 – 1 Mill</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>54.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budapest</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>64.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hungarian Census 1990, Meusburger 2001
Proportion of illiterates among ethnic groups in Yugoslavia in 1948

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationalität</th>
<th>Anteil an gesamter Bevölkerung</th>
<th>Anteil der Analphabeten in Prozent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>zusammen</td>
<td>männlich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slowenen</td>
<td>9,0</td>
<td>2,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tschechen</td>
<td>0,2</td>
<td>3,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slowaken</td>
<td>0,5</td>
<td>4,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deutsche</td>
<td>0,4</td>
<td>6,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italiener</td>
<td>0,5</td>
<td>6,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ungarn</td>
<td>3,1</td>
<td>8,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumänen</td>
<td>0,4</td>
<td>17,6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kroaten</td>
<td>24,0</td>
<td>18,1</td>
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<td>Bulgaren</td>
<td>0,4</td>
<td>19,9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Montenegriner</td>
<td>2,7</td>
<td>24,1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serben</td>
<td>41,5</td>
<td>27,7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Makedonier</td>
<td>5,1</td>
<td>30,2</td>
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<td>Wallachen</td>
<td>0,7</td>
<td>38,2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autonome Moslems</td>
<td>5,1</td>
<td>54,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Türken</td>
<td>0,6</td>
<td>63,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albaner</td>
<td>4,8</td>
<td>73,7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zigeuner</td>
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<tr>
<td>alle Nationalitäten</td>
<td>100,0</td>
<td>25,4</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Quelle: UNESCO, 1953, 166.
Spatial disparities of educational achievement resemble not only economic disparities but also historical and cultural legacies. These disparities are very persistent.

Disparities of educational achievement

- **Educational achievement** of an ethnic minority influences:
  - its economic performance
  - its political and cultural competitiveness
  - its degree of its vulnerability
  - Its collective social status, the way how the minority is viewed and respected by others

- **Large disparities** of educational achievement between ethnic minorities are a source of:
  - potential conflicts
  - exploitation on the labour market
  - social inequalities

**Important research agendas**

- to study the educational achievement of ethnic groups and its variations in time and space,
- to analyse the spatial mobility of highly and lowly skilled members of ethnic groups,
- to examine their positions in key branches of information processing and decision making
The role of teachers in multilingual areas

- Ethnic identity, cultural roots, skills, and experience of teachers will decide whether they will act as key persons in the social networks of the ethnic community and as role models for their students or not
  - If teachers are indifferent or ignorant of the culture and experiences of their students and have low expectations of them, the learning process will be much slower
- The quality of attachment and mutual understanding between teachers, students and parents is important for the vertical transmission of culture.
  - Interpersonal relationships and interactions between teachers and minority students (including their parents) do not evolve automatically but as a matter of mutual respect and trust
  - Insiders who belong to the same ethnic group and who share the same values, fate, and memories are more trusted than outsiders so that they are more reliable as sources of information.
  - Emotional support from teachers and sound relationships between children and teachers enhance children’s susceptibility and tendency to comply with these agents of socialization

The role of teachers in multilingual areas

- in the first grades of elementary school it is most important whether teachers speak the same language and and belong to the same culture as the children
  - If teachers belong to a “different world”,
    - they can hardly fulfil their role as possible agents of socialization.
    - instead of providing the students with a cultural identity, a sense of belonging, and pride of their ethnic group, they will rather put them in a situation of ambiguity, frustration, and lack of self-confidence
- Teachers can play important roles as key persons of social, cultural and political activities outside the school system
- If an ethnic minority is short of such key persons, its identity and cultural practices will be negatively affected
In minority areas teachers act as important key persons of cultural activities.

In percent:
- <= 75
- 75 <= 85
- 85 <= 90
- 90 <= 95
- 95 <

Source: NYC Board of Education, 2000
Design: E. Messow (2001)

School districts with a majority of Hispanics and African Americans:
- have the lowest proportion of certified teachers
- have the lowest scores in achievement tests in English and Mathematics
- have the highest proportion of drop outs
- have the lowest proportions of students with high-school diploma
Key research questions concerning teachers in multilingual areas

- Ethnic, social and regional origin of teachers
  - Are they familiar with the milieu of their students?
  - Do they act in favour or against the cultural interests of a minority group?
- To what extent are the teachers embedded in the minority culture?
  - How many teachers are residents of the community where they teach?
  - For how many years have they taught in the ethnic territory?
  - How large is the turnover rate of teachers?
- What is the age and gender proportion of the teaching staff?
- Which skills and teaching experience do they have?
- What are the academic achievements of their students?
- Which functions and roles do teachers perform in the community apart from teaching?

Language of instruction in multilingual areas

- Language is
  - the “heart of knowledge” (Strohmaier, 2003)
  - a significant carrier of culture
  - a central element of identity
- The language of instruction in ethnically mixed areas is heavily contested since 19th century
  - It emerged as “a focal point of conflict between the state building and the nation emancipation process” (Eriksen et al. 1991)
  - For advocates of minority rights,
    - Usage of the first language in elementary schools is a civil right as well as the best guarantee for high educational attainment.
  - For the dominating elite,
    - The mother tongue of minorities has only the temporary aim of cultural transition and adjustment to instruction in the mainstream language
Language of instruction in multilingual areas

- Discontinuities between the cultural home environment and the school environment can have very negative effects on
  - cognitive functioning,
  - social adjustment,
  - motivation,
  - ethnic identity of minority children.
- One of the most severe discontinuities in the life of minority children happens
  - when the mother tongue is not spoken in school
  - when the children have not learned the language of instruction before entering school age.
- When minority children are placed in a school system in which they cannot understand their teachers during the first year(s), they will suffer from a long-lasting discrimination that nearly automatically leads to low motivation and poor educational achievement.

The key questions concerning the language of instruction

- Where and to what extent are minorities allowed to use their mother tongue as language of instruction?
- Which proportion of minority parents is in favour of bilingual education?
- How were minority schools with their own language of instruction established and for what reasons?
- What is the spatial location pattern and size of schools in which the minorities can use their mother tongues?
- Which social, economic, and political factors influenced the extension or shrinking of areas where minority languages are used in schools?
- Which skills do minority children have in the language of instruction when entering elementary school?
Size and location of minority schools

- Globalisation and transculturality
  - do not mean that the relation between ethnicity and space is now completely irrelevant.
  - Knowledge is not only conditioned by power, rhetorical or textual construction, but also by social solidarity and trust.
  - Solidarity and trust are created by rituals and face-to-face contacts.
  - the rootedness to places does matter in certain periods of socialization and cultural learning.
- Cultural knowledge is created through practices and interaction in particular places and is embedded in specific social contexts.

In order to secure the survival of their culture, ethnic and religious minorities have to organize learning opportunities for their children to socialize them in particular ways. Common codes of communication, shared understanding, secret symbolic knowledge, narratives, and cultural practices have to be learned, developed and practiced at certain places in order to be internalised.

Places function as spatial anchors for historical traditions and memories.
Size and location of minority schools

- **Learning practices** are realized
  - in an informal way at home, among friends and via media
  - in formalized situations such as schools, and other institutions of education.

- **Minority schools** are more than a place of instruction and formal education
  - They represent a site and context
    - where social relations evolve
    - where identities, social cohesion, self-awareness, goals, attitudes, cultural preferences, discourses, stereotypes and social inequalities are produced
  - They offer a place
    - where parents, teachers and other role models interact
    - where cultural performances are organized

- The context of education is most decisive for the outcome of learning

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Size and location of minority schools

- Even when the right to use one's mother tongue in school is guaranteed by law, it requires the existence
  - of a group that is entitled to it
  - of a place where the law can be applied

- Both conditions can be manipulated by state administration.
  - Minority rights concerning school autonomy can be manipulated by
    - gerrymandering of catchment areas
    - creation of larger school units and larger catchment areas (centralization of the elementary school system)
    - regulations concerning the minimum size of classes and schools

- If small classes and small schools are not allowed, minorities have little chance
  - to uphold their autonomy in educational affairs
  - to employ their own teachers and
  - to use their mother tongue as language of instruction
The modernization of the elementary school system has often been used:
- to close small schools (one or two-class schools) in rural areas
- to centralize the school system in cities

The main argument of closing small schools was,
- that large schools have better results than small schools
- that small schools are too expensive
- that large schools can offer more specialized courses

The prejudice towards small schools may have been justified in former times, when one teacher taught 40-70 pupils of different age in one classroom.

When one-class schools were situated in extreme periphery and in old and badly equipped buildings.
Today small one- or two-class elementary schools are quite different from former times and have better results than most large schools in big cities. Pupils learn better to concentrate themselves on a task. They become more independent. They cooperate more.

Are small schools more expensive?

Not if the building is used for more than one function.

This building contains:
- the local elementary school
- the administration of the local community
- the local post office
- the rehearsal room of the music band
- the local kindergarten
Key questions concerning the size and location of minority schools

- Which instruments, methods, and arguments are used to support or close minority schools?
  - What is the minimal number of students required for founding or closing a minority school or a class of bilingual education?
  - Where and for what reasons have minority schools been closed?
- How much are minorities interested to have their own schools?
- Which economic and social consequences did the community have to bear after the school was closed?
- How can the relationships between the spatial patterns of minority schools and the social, economic, and political dynamics of ethnic minorities be explained?
- Is there growth or reduction in the location pattern of minority schools over time?

Conclusion

- The relevance of the research issues discussed in this paper depends largely on the type of ethnic group and its cultural situation which varies in time and space
- It makes a difference whether minorities were forcefully integrated by internal colonialism or by expansion of territory or whether they immigrated voluntarily in search of employment and better economic opportunities
- From the viewpoint of human rights, the main issue is
  - whether an ethnic group is forced by the majority or the state to give up parts of its culture and identity, or
  - whether a group voluntarily and gradually acquires some elements of a larger society’s repertoire of concepts and norms
- A minority’s reactions and attitudes towards education reveal a great deal
  - about the degree of ethnic awareness
  - the internal coherence of ethnic groups
  - the degree of suppression by the majority
  - the desire of ethnic groups to maintain their culture


