Ivan Illich's visions on education in practice: from countercultural educational projects in the 1970s to indigenous decolonial pedagogy from the 1990s on

Perspectivas de Ivan Illich sobre a educação na prática: de projetos educacionais contraculturais na década de 1970 à pedagogia decolonial indígena dos anos 1990 em diante

Las visiones de Ivan Illich sobre educación en la práctica: de los proyectos educativos contraculturales en la década de 1970 a la pedagogía indígena decolonial a partir de la década de 1990

L'éducation en pratique d'après Ivan Illich : des projets éducatifs contre-culturels des années 1970 à la pédagogie autochtone décoloniale des années 1990.

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Abstract

Ivan Illich published *Deschooling Society* in 1971. In this paper we examine educational projects and movements grounded either in a countercultural vision or in Indigenous pedagogical proposals. Central questions in our paper are: How do these projects read Illich within the specific context in which they were inserted? What were the intentions of those who drew on Illich's ideas? In the first part of the paper we examine two spaces that worked with notions of counterculture: the CIDOC in Cuernavaca (Mexico) and The Learning Exchange, located in Evanston (Chicago, United States). We then focus on Illich's influence on John Holt, who led the long-standing homeschooling movement from 1977, and on the work of Lee Felsenstein, who introduced Illich's ideas to the Homebrew Computer Club in 1975. Finally, we study the theoretical foundations underlying "La Universidad de la Tierra".

Keywords: Ivan Illich. Deschooling. Counterculture. Decolonial pedagogy.

Resumo

Ivan Illich publicou *Deschooling Society* em 1971. Neste artigo, são examinados projetos educacionais e movimentos fundamentados tanto numa visão contracultural como em propostas pedagógicas indígenas. As questões centrais no presente trabalho são: como esses projetos leem Illich dentro do contexto específico em que estavam inseridos? Quais foram as intenções daqueles que se basearam nas ideias de Illich? Na primeira parte do artigo, são examinados dois espaços que funcionaram com noções de contracultura: o CIDOC, em Cuernavaca (México); e o Learning Exchange, em Evanston (Chicago, EUA). Em seguida, foca-se a influência de Illich sobre John Holt, que liderou o movimento do ensino doméstico a partir de 1977, e Lee Felsenstein, que introduziu as ideias de Illich no Homebrew Computer Club em 1975. Por fim, analisam-se os fundamentos teóricos subjacentes a "La Universidad de la Tierra".

Palavras-chave: Ivan Illich. Desescolarização. Contracultura. Pedagogia decolonial.

Resumen

Ivan Illich publicó *Deschooling Society* en 1971. En este artículo examinamos proyectos y movimientos educativos basados en una visión contracultural o en propuestas pedagógicas indígenas. Las preguntas centrales de nuestro artículo son: ¿Cómo leen estos proyectos a Illich dentro del contexto específico en el que se insertaron? ¿Cuáles eran las intenciones de quienes se inspiraron en las ideas de Illich? En la primera parte del artículo examinamos dos espacios que trabajaron con nociones de contracultura: el CIDOC en Cuernavaca (México) y The Learning Exchange, ubicado en Evanston (Chicago, Estados Unidos). Luego nos centramos en la influencia de Illich en John Holt, quien lideró el movimiento de educación en el hogar de larga data desde 1977, y en el trabajo de Lee Felsenstein, quien introdujo las ideas de Illich en el Homebrew Computer Club en 1975. Finalmente, estudiamos los fundamentos teóricos subyacentes en "La Universidad de la Tierra".

Palabras clave: Ivan Illich. Desescolarización. Contracultura. Pedagogía decolonial.

Résumé

Ivan Illich a publié *Deschooling Society* (*Déscolariser la société*, traduit sous le titre *Une société sans école*) en 1971. Dans cet article, nous examinons des projets et des mouvements éducatifs fondés soit sur une vision contre-culturelle, soit sur des propositions pédagogiques autochtones. Les questions centrales de notre article sont les suivantes: Comment ces projets interprètent-ils Illich dans leur contexte spécifique ? Quelles furent les intentions de ceux qui se sont inspirés des idées d'Illich ? Dans un premier temps, nous examinons deux endroits qui ont été impliqués avec des notions de contre-culture : le CIDOC (le centre interculturel de documentation) à Cuernavaca (au Mexique) et The Learning Exchange, situé à Evanston (à Chicago). Nous examinons ensuite l'influence d'Illich sur John Holt, qui a dirigé le mouvement de longue date de l'enseignement à domicile à partir de 1977, et sur l'oeuvre de Lee Felsenstein, qui a présenté les idées d'Illich au Homebrew Computer Club en 1975. Nous terminons par une étude des fondements sous-jacentes de « L'Université de la Terre ».

Mots clés: Ivan Illich. Déscolarisation. Contre-culture. Pédagogie décoloniale.

Introduction

A number of recent publications in major scholarly journals feature careful studies of Ivan Illich's career[1]. The papers coincide in pointing out that Illich's intellectual background was structured around two main coordinates: his family environment and the Catholic Church. Illich was born in Vienna in 1926 and grew up in an upper-bourgeois Jewish family converted to Catholicism. In 1942 he moved to Italy. He began his studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome in 1944 and became an ordained priest in 1951, the same year he completed his doctorate at the University of Salzburg.

The 1960s positioned Illich as one of the main critical voices in the Catholic Church, especially in Latin America and the United States[2]. A few short weeks into his trip to New York in 1951, he received immediate support from the then controversial archbishop of the city, the conservative Cardenal Francis Joseph Spellman. This fact helps explain the speed at which Illich gained access to intellectual spheres of prestige in America despite his still being a young newly ordained priest. After several years working in parishes in the Big Apple, Illich was appointed by Spellman to the position of vice chancellor at the Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico. In 1960, he abruptly left his pastoral work on the Caribbean island and began different projects in Mexico, specifically in Cuernavaca. His goal at that time was to take part in training missionaries being sent to Latin America[3].

The first center founded by Illich in Cuernavaca was the Center for Cultural Research (the CIC, Centro de Investigaciones Culturales). This was a residence that offered courses on specific topics for people who were answering Pope John XXIII's call to take part in missions in Latin America[4]. In 1963, also in Cuernavaca, he and Valentina Borremas set up the Intercultural Documentation Center (Centro Intercultural de Documentación, CIDOC. These spaces for debate, as well as the books and papers published at the centers, may be conceptualized "as a refractory microcosm"[5]. It is also important to point out here that at that time, Illich "was close to Bishop Sergio Méndez Arceo, social psychoanalyst Erich Fromm, and Prior of the Benedictine Convent Gregorio Lemercier in an environment of experimentation and *aggiornamento*, even before Vatican II."[6]

In the 1960s, the CIDOC became a point of reference intellectually and politically. Intellectual leaders of the time, such as Paulo Freire, Paul Goodman, Peter Berger, and Augusto Salazar Bondy took part in its seminars. This was also when Illich published a set of writings that evidenced a process of radicalization in his ideas on the Catholic Church. This was the case of "The Seamy Side of Charity" (1971)[7] and "The Vanishing Clergyman" (1971)[8], both published for the first time in 1967. These two articles were a jolt to the more

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[1] See: R. Bruno-Jofré and J. Igelmo Zaldívar, *Fifty Years Later: Situating Deschooling Society in Illich's Intellectual and Personal Journey*, Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2022; D. Cayley, *Ivan Illich. An Intellectual Journey*, University Park, PA: Penn state University Press, 2021; T. Hartch, T., *The Prophet of Cuernavaca. Ivan Illich and the Crisis of the West*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

[2] I. Illich, *La Iglesia sin poder. Ensayos (1955-1985)*, Madrid: Trotta, 2021.

[3] R. Bruno-Jofré and J. Igelmo Zaldívar, 'Monsignor Ivan Illich's critique of the institutional Church, 1960-1966', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 67 (4) (2016), 568-586. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046915003383

[4] R. Bruno-Jofré and J. Igelmo Zaldívar, 'The Center for Intercultural Formation, Cuernavaca, Mexico, its Reports (1962-1967) and Illich's critical understanding of mission in Latin America', *Hispania Sacra*, extra II July-December (2014), 457-487, 2014. DOI: http://doi.org/10.3989/hs.2014.096

[5] R. Bruno-Jofré and J. Igelmo Zaldívar, *Fifty Years Later: Situating Deschooling Society in Illich's Intellectual and Personal Journey*, Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press. 2022, xv.

[6] Ibid.

[7] I. Illich, 'The Seamy Side of Charity', in I. Illich, *Celebration of Awareness: A Call for Institutional Revolution,* 57–84, New York: Anchor Books, 1971.

[8] I. Illich, 'The Vanishing Clergyman', in I. Illich, *Celebration of Awareness: A Call for Institutional Revolution*, 36–56, New York: Anchor Books, 1971.

conservative sectors of the Church and a cause of concern in the Vatican hierarchy. Consequently, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith began a sanction process against Illich, with notable repercussion in the press, The New York Times included[9]. These events mark an intellectual notch in Illich's career. He ceased his criticism of the Catholic Church and shifted his interest to criticizing schools as a modern institution, analogous to the institutionalization of the Catholic Church. The main results of this turnabout were a number of articles and conferences Illich published in leading American journals, some of which had broad impact among counterculture groups. In 1971, the prestigious publisher Harper & Row proposed gathering these texts into a volume for commercial release. Thus was born the first edition of *Deschooling Society*[10].

After *Deschooling Society* was published in 1971, Illich's ideas made considerable waves among schoolteachers and in social movements that were critical of the performance of modern institutions. From the perspective of the ecology of knowledge, Illich's theses caused a shift in the formal fundamental conceptualization of the relationship between the learner and the body of knowledge in Educational Sciences[11]. In his book, Illich called out for the incidental or informal component in learning new skills or knowledge: "A radical alternative to a schooled society requires not only new formal mechanisms for the formal acquisition of skills and their educational use. A deschooled society implies a new approach to incidental or informal education"[12]. Thus, from a historical perspective, the originality of Illich's ideas resides in their ability to question the type of knowledge being produced by the modern institutionalized world. His object of criticism was the way in which institutions administrated by their respective bodies of experts spread exponentially across every nation in the world. As he noted in the main thesis of his essay "Tools for Conviviality", this led him to state that the knowledge generated by professional capitalism shackles people more imperceptibly and more effectively than the finance markets or the international arms trade[13].

This paper will examine the most notable attempts to put Illich's ideas into practice in education over the last fifty years[14]. We find a clear lack of studies tracing the practical reception of Illich's ideas, especially on education, which have inspired specific projects that have had a significant and extensive impact from the decolonial perspective. We begin by analyzing the disruptive dynamics to education implemented at the CIDOC in Cuernavaca (Mexico) and The Learning Exchange in Evanston, Illinois. We then take a deeper look at the way in which Illich's ideas were used as the foundation of movements such as homeschooling and the appropriate technology movement. Key here are the works of John Holt and Lee

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[9] E. B. Fiske 'Illich Goes His Own Way,' published in *New York Times*, Section E, 2 February 1969, p. 5.

[10] I. Illich, *Deschooling Society,* New York: Harper & Row, 1972.

[11] For a concise description of the "Ecology of Knowledge" concept, we take Jerzy A. Wojciechowski's explanation: "'Ecology of Knowledge' (EOK), pushes the boundaries of the modern understanding of 'thinking' and opens new horizons in philosophy. It creates the possibility of a newer intellectual space in which to engage with other knowledge constructs and thinking emanating from separate philosophical traditions. EOK makes a critical contribution to the future of humanity at this time of unprecedented inter-cultural exchange between different conceptions of how to think about thinking and the knowledge it produces. It suggests keys to innovation and creativity essential for the continuation of life as we know it." J. A. Wojciechowski (2010) *Ecology of Knowledge*. Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2010, 135.

[12] I. Illich, op cit, 1972, 32-33.

[13] I. Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, New York: Harper & Row, 1973.

[14] In addition to the sources already cited in this article so far, we add the following writings: L. Hoinacki and C. Mitcham, *The Challenges of Ivan Illich*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2002; S. Ewel, *Faith Seeking Conviviality: Reflections on Ivan Illich, Christian Mission, and the Promise of Life Together*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019; J. Baldacchino, *Educing Ivan Illich: Reform, Contingency and Disestablishment*, London: Peter Lang, 2020; H. Beck, *Otra modernidad es posible. El pensamiento de Iván Illich*, Barcelona, Ciudad de México, Buenos Aires, Nueva York: Malpaso Ediciones, 2017; J. M. Sbert, *Epimeteo, Iván Illich y el sendero de la sabiduría*, México: Ediciones sin Nombre, 2009.

Felsenstein. Thirdly, we examine the reception of Illich's ideas in the actions carried out by the Universidad de la Tierra in Mexico, an organization closely linked with the indigenous movement, and more specifically, with the neo-Zapatist movement.

1. The early practice of deschooling

Not only did Illich's ideas generate significant debate in academic and social circles, they also inspired specific projects aimed at implementing the disruptive theses of deschooling. Understandably, the first place to receive the deschooling theory and put it into practice was the CIDOC in Cuernavaca. From 1963 to 1976 the center was directed by Valentina Borremans as executive director, with Illich serving as president of the board[15]. As José María Sbert points out, this independent academic center "soon became a privileged place for capturing and celebrating the desire for renewal and reformative imagination of the time"[16]. Its seminars were attended by "young students from all over, theologians, leaders, and thinkers from myriad tendencies"[17]. Similarly, The Learning Exchange, begun in 1971, also notably received Illich's ideas early on, in this case in the USA.

The CIDOC was legally constituted as an independent educational corporation, registered in April 1963 as a Civil Association in accordance with the laws of the states of Morelos[18]. Its offices and facilities were located at first in the old Hotel Chulavista, the same place that had housed the CIC[19]. Later, in April 1966, the project was moved to Rancho Tetela. According to some of the Center's publications in those early years, the CIDOC was not a university. Indeed, the Center styled itself as a meeting point for humanists concerned with analyzing the effect of ideological change on the hearts and minds of men[20]. The CIDOC's point of departure was Illich's criticism of modern universities in *Deschooling Society*: "The modern university has forfeited its chance to provide a simple setting for encounters which are both autonomous and anarchic, focused yet unplanned and ebullient, and has chosen instead to manage the process by which so-called research and instruction are produced"[21].

The main context for CIDOC's undertakings was Latin America. The Center was a place created to study and understand the implications of a social revolution, but not an instrument for promoting particular theories of social action or for planning activism. As Todd Hartch notes, "CIDOC presented itself not as university or a school but merely as 'a meeting place for humanists.' It had no set curriculum, did not represent a particular ideology, and in fact prohibited it visitors from using the center as base for planning any specific sort of political or revolutionary action"[22].

From the start, the library at CIDOC became the home base for a center of documentation containing a unique collection of material on Latin America that included manuscripts and documents that were difficult to access even in the United States and Canada. The Center offered its associates a framework for independent, creative knowledge and the chance to carry out research calmly, complemented with unstructured colloquia. The CIDOC's activities were organized in keen continuity with Illich's ideas from sixth chapter of *Deschooling Society*, "Learning Webs":

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[15] J. Igelmo Zaldívar, *Ivan Illich en el CIDOC de Cuernavaca (1963-1976). Un acontecimiento para la teoría y la historia de la educación*, Doctoral dissertation defended at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2011.

[16] J. M. Sbert, op. cit, 2009, 62-63.

[17] Ibid., 91.

[18] CIDOC, *CIDOC Catálogo de publicaciones 1970*, «CIDOC Cuaderno» no 1010, Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1970, 0/3.

[19] R. Bruno-Jofré and J. Igelmo Zaldívar, op. cit. 2014.

[20] CIDOC, op cit, 1970, 3/3.

[21] I. Illich, op cit, 1972, 51.

[22] T. Hartch, op cit, 2015, 113.

> The right of free assembly has been politically recognized and culturally accepted. We should now understand that this right is curtailed by laws that make some forms of assembly obligatory. This is especially the case with institutions which conscript according to age group, class, or sex, and which are very time-consuming. The army is one example. School is an even more outrageous one.
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> To deschool means to abolish the power of one person to oblige another person to attend a meeting. It also means recognizing the right of any person, of any age or sex, to call a meeting. This right has been drastically diminished by the institutionalization of meetings. "Meeting" originally referred to the result of an individual's act of gathering. Now it refers to the institutional product of some agency[23].

All it took to organize these colloquia was for someone associated with the Center to submit a proposal. The applicant had absolute freedom to use any research method and orientation or methodology he or she desired[24]. To ensure this model of organization, the CIDOC did its own funding and management through registration fees it set for each service on offer. The main source of income was the language courses it offered to foreigners at Cuernavaca. In addition, researchers who went to the library to research their work also had to pay. CIDOC's own publications soon took up a wide range of areas on educational policy, new perspectives for sustainable architecture, the institutionalization of medicine and social psychology. These collections were published as CIDOC Reports", "CIDOC Documents" and "CIDOC Notes". Between 1963 and 1976, many different intellectuals, mainly from the Americas, travelled to Cuernavaca to take part in CIDOC activities. Such was the case with Erich From, André Gorz, Peter Berger, Michael Maccoby, John Womack, Enrique Dussel, Jean-Pierre Dupuy, Susan Sontag, Gabriel Zaid, and Ramón Xirau, among others.

As for The Learning Exchange, it may have been the first educational project beyond CIDOC to base itself on Illich's ideas from *Deschooling Society* in order to put them into practice. The origin of the project is linked with a lecture given by Illich himself at Northwestern University, north of Chicago, in 1971 as part of the Mars Lecture Series. At this talk, Illich urged listeners by saying that "now was the time for the creation of viable educational alternatives in the Chicago area"[25]. The conference was promoted by Denis Detzel, then a graduate student at Northwestern who had attended different seminars at CIDOC in Mexico.

A few months after the lecture series, on May 26, 1971, Detzel founded The Learning Exchange in Evanston less than 2 miles from the campus where Illich had given his talk. The main lines of the project had been sketched out at CIDOC at forum where Detzel had participated along with Edgar Friedenberg, Paul Goodman, Ivan Illich, and Everett Reimer. What this group discussed was the possibility "to find a way to tap the unused, underutilized education resources that exist in a community and then find the simple, inexpressive way to make those resources available to members of the community"[26]. The project that was finally started up worked in the following way:

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[23] I Illich, op cit, 1972, 135.

[24] V. Borremans, V. 'Carta a los miembros del CELAM', in CIDOC, *México "entredicho" del Vaticano al CIDOC 1966-1969*, 4/35-4/37, «CIDOC Dossier» no 37, Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1967.

[25] M. T. Markowski, Shorting out the school machine, *The Thorn/ Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology*, 8 (18) (1973), 2-4, 4.

[26] R. Lewis and D. R. Kinishi, *The Learning Exchange. What it is, how it works*. Evanston, IL: The Learning Exchange, 1977, 1.

The Learning Exchange is a free educational matching service in the Chicago metropolitan area. Anyone who wants to teach, learn, or discuss any subject, skill, or topic of interest through the Learning Exchange.

For example, if a person wants to learn Spanish, he can call the Learning Exchange and indicate his interest. The Learning Exchange will then give that caller name and phone numbers of previous callers who have offered to teach Spanish. It is then the responsibility of that person to call those Spanish teachers and work out arrangement with one, or any number of them, which are mutually agreeable. If there are no teachers registered in the topic a caller wants to learn, his name and interest are registered, and when someone calls who would like to teach that particular subject, that later is given the name of the learner. If a caller cannot find an appropriate match when he first calls the Learning Exchange, he can also call back in a few weeks, or whenever it is convenient for him, in order to find out if any new callers have registered his appropriate matching interest[27].

Over the six years following the start of the project in Evanston, nearly 100 other similar projects opened in the USA, with names such as The Learning Connection, Creative Alternative, Finger-Lickin' Learning, The Class Factory and Manhattan Resources[28], although many of these spaces ran for only a few months. Officially, these centers were cataloged as Learning Referral Centers. Their rapid expansion was linked to the counterculture movement and its search for experimenting with alternative ways of thinking about institutionalized learning.

The tie between deschooling and counterculture was made possible largely by the type and tone of discourse generated by Illich in *Deschooling Society*. The book went so far as to note that "an educational revolution depends on a twofold version: a new orientation for research and a new understanding of the educational style of an emerging counterculture"[29]. Advocacy of a "new understanding of the educational style", as interpreted by projects such as The Learning Exchange, began from an existential distrust of the performance of official institutions. This suspicion was characteristic of the counterculture movement in the USA, which, as Mark McGurl points out, challenged fundamental elements of the progressive discourse that held sway in American society at the time. As McGurl notes, "While so much of the political activism of the Civil Rights era centered around the question of access to educational institutions […] the counterculture became preoccupied instead with the very nature of 'education' as an existential process in and of the individual person"[30].

The CIDOC and The Learning Exchange were two spaces of early reception of Illich's ideas. Common to both is Illich's own direct intervention in their startup. The CIDOC was undoubtedly the prime space for implementing key ideas from *Deschooling Society*. Cuernavaca was where they experimented with the possibility of setting up a learning center that would put disruptive distance from the dynamics of official educational institutions. For its part, The Learning Exchange made it possible to create networks of learning and exchange that

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[27] G. D. Squires, *The Learning Exchange: An Experiment in Alternative Education*. Thesis for the M.A. Degree. Michigan State University-Department of Sociology, 1974, 34.

[28] R. Calvert and W. A. Draves, *Free Universities and Learning Referral Centers*, Washington: National Center for Education Statistics, 1978, 2.

[29] Illich, op. cit. 1972, 101.

[30] M. McGurl, Learning from Little Tree: The Political Education of the Counterculture, *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 18 (2) (2005), 243-267, 256.

challenged the foundational epistemology of modern education systems. Important figures in the counterculture movement took interest and participated in both spaces to the extent that they questioned the nature of education from a radical position.

2. Deschooling in subaltern movements in the second half of the 20th century

Ideas on deschooling inspired several sweeping subaltern movements in the fields of education and technology in the second half of the 20th century. Two key figures were John Holt and Lee Felsenstein. They both read Illich from a situation of belonging to secondary groups in Gramscian terms, situated on the margins of the political, social, educational, and economic system of the time[31]. Holt was the one who spearheaded the homeschooling movement in the USA in 1977. Illich's ideas were key in the process of radicalization he underwent in the 1970s. For his part, Lee Felsenstein introduced Illich's ideas to the Homebrew Computer Club in 1975. This group was at the vanguard of a movement of engineers linked with the "appropriate technology movement", aimed at making the world of computational technology more accessible to individuals[32]. Specifically, Felsenstein drew on Illich's tools for convivial education to design Osborne 1 in 1981, considered the first commercially successful portable computer. Because of its novelty, Robert Slater dubbed Osborne 1 as "the father of the portable computer"[33].

Holt received his first invitation from Illich and the CIDOC in Cuernavaca in 1969. As Holt himself tells it, "One day in the fall of 1969 Jonathan Kozol called me up to say that someone named Ivan lllich, whom I probably had not hear of (I had in fact seen one newspaper story about him), was going to invite me to teach some sort of seminar in Cuernavaca. (…) Not long after, Illich did call and invite me"[34]. In January and February 1970, Holt made his first trip to Cuernavaca to take part in the CIDOC's activities. The visit lasted two weeks. This became the first of a series of yearly trips between 1970 and 1975 to participate in the seminars Illich's CIDOC had opened at Rancho Tetela for thinking critically about modern educational institutions.

On his first visit to Cuernavaca, in a letter to CIDOC students dated February 19, 1970, he wrote "the two weeks I spent among you and with you were among the most interesting, pleasant, and valuable of my life"[35]. His letter went on about the type of discussions he had had at the seminars he had taken part in: "My short visit to CIDOC made me feel much more strongly than before that our worldwide system of schooling is far more harmful, and far more deeply and integrally connected with many of the other great evils of our time, than I had supposed"[36]. These seminars in Cuernavaca had a profound effect on Holt, who went so far as to say in an interview with the Los Angeles Free Press that, from his perspective, the CIDOC was like "a watering hole for some of the wild animals of this world"[37].

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[31] A. Gramsci, *Subaltern Social Groups. A Critical Edition of Prison Notebook 25*, NY: Columbia University Press, 2021.

[32] C. Pursell, The Rise and Fall of the Appropriate Technology Movement in the United States, 1965-1985, *Technology and Culture*, 34 (3) (1993), 629-637.

[33] R. Slater, *Portraits in silicon* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987, 329.

[34] J. Holt, *Never Too Late. My Musical Life Story*, New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1991, 183.

[35] J. Holt, 'A letter advocating school resistance, addressed to participants in the author's seminar course held at CIDOC in February 1970', Biblioteca Daniel Cossío Villegas del Colegio de México. folder: 370.4D637 (1970), p. 1-5, 1.

[36] Ibíd., 1-2.

[37] No author, 'Learning is not a stone. Network of humane school districts', Published in the newspaper *The Los Angeles Free Press*, March 19-25, 1971, pp. 21 and 61, 61.

One can trace the radicalization process in Holt's intellectual journey after his stay at the CIDOC and his meeting in person with Illich[38]. In the years following his trip to Cuernavaca, Holt took a turn in his conception of education, which he set down in his writings. The most evident case, as noted above, was the book he published in 1972 called *Freedom and Beyond*. In the first few pages, Holtmade an interesting statement on the shift in his way of thinking: "It no longer seems to me that any imaginable sum of school reforms would be enough to provide good education for everyone or even for children. People, even children, are educated much more by the whole society around them and the general quality of life in it than they are by what happens in schools" [39]. This idea formed the crux of some of his best-known books published from the 1970s on.

After his time at CIDOC, Holt stated quite bluntly that he was thinking of a society with neither schools nor institutions to administrate education, one in which learning was not separate from the rest of life. Still in the 1970s, Holt started up a project at the Beacon Hill Free School in Boston. This project "in its first years has attracted hundred or more pupils, and on a budget of practically nothing - a good example of the kind of open educational network that Ivan Illich has written about"[40].

Nevertheless, another project that Holt took on was the one that attained considerable international projection was the homeschooling movement. In 1977, Holt founded the publication that would become the communication device for families in the USA who decided not to send their children to school and for families beyond its borders as well. This was the journal *Growing Without Schooling*, whose purpose was to foster "a way to support families that were scattered around the country and were letting their children learn outside the school"[41]. In its first issue, Holt keyed in on the theme of the new publication: "it will be about people who, during some of their own growing up, did not go to school, what they did instead, and how they made a place for themselves in the world"[42]. At the same time, it made the claim that GWS was a tool grounded in pedagogy: "we will be very interested, as the schools and schools of education do not seem to be, in the act and art of teaching, that is, all the ways in which people, of all ages, in or out of school, can more effectively share information, ideas, and skills"[43].

Leaving the topic of the homeschooling/unschooling movement aside, it is time to analyze the impact *Deschooling Society* had among those who studied the development of information and communication technologies in education, i.e., attending to the challenge they posed to institutionalized learning and teaching processes. Particularly inspiring in this regard was the chapter on "learning webs", already appearing in the first edition of *Deschooling Soc*iety in 1971. Lee Felsenstein, who designed the first portable computer produced in series in 1981, the Osborne Computer, was one of the first to glean the potential of Illich's ideas in designing technologies that broke the hegemonic paradigm. In his own words, "The learning process should be built into the design of the equipment. (…) I call the quality of the design which includes the user in the learning process the conviviality of the design, a term concept

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[38] P. Quiroga Uceda and J. Igelmo Zaldívar (2019). El viaje a Cuernavaca, México, de John Holt y su relevancia para la historia del Movimiento Global de la Educación en Casa. *Práxis Educativa*, vol. 15 (2019), pp. 1-15. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5212/PraxEduc.v.15.14772.033.

[39] J. Holt, *Freedom and Beyond*, Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1995, 3-4.

[40] Ibíd., 68.

[41] S. Sheffer, 'Doing Something Very Different', in ;M Hern, *Everywhere All the Time: a New Deschooling Reader* (pp. 231-238), USA: AK Press, 2008, 233.

[42] P. Farenga and C. Ricci (eds.), *Growing Without Schooling: The Complete Collection, Volume 1, 1977 to 1981*, Medford, MA: HoltGWS LLC Books, 2018, 10.

[43] Ibid.

taken from Ivan Illich"[44]. Over the last thirty years, with the development of the internet, new approaches to Illich's work have been posed by theories such as connectivism[45] and edupunk[46]. As Kirsten Olson notes, "As Illich might have predicted, new *tools* have changed the paradigm. With the advent of the internet, the usual assumptions about who gets access to knowledge— who owns it, how it is produced, who is authorized to "legitimate" it, what "it" actually is—are radically altering"[47]. In his youth, Felsenstein took active part in the New Left movement. In 1964, while a student at the University of California, he was arrested for participating in a sit-in known as the "Sproul Hall Sit-in" and promoted within the Free Speech Movement at Berkley. Starting in 1966, he wrote for and participated in the editorial board of the magazine *The Berkley Barb*. By 1969 he was doing the same for *The Berkley Tribe*. In 1972 he received a B.S. in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. In 1974 Felsenstein designed the Tom Swift Terminal, which was "a sturdy terminal designed to connect people to a mainframe computer or network"[48]. His design put into practice a paradigm shift to computer design. His project was written up in 1974, with Felsenstein underscoring the "convivial design" of his product while acknowledging that "I will use the term 'convivial' to refer to this 'no-industrial' type of design for tools and systems. The term is from the book 'Tools for Conviviality' by Ivan Illich"[49]. The following year, Felsenstein and Fred More, a militant anti-Vietnam War protester interested in technology, founded the Homebrew Computer Club, which started up as "a place for hobbyists to learn about and develop their own machines and software"[50].

The concept of "conviviality" is present in *Deschooling Society*, although Illich developed it in greater detail in his book *Convivial Tools*. He introduced the concept of conviviality to highlight the importance of creativity, decentralization, and autonomy in the construction of technological tools. The aim was to cast aside the monopolized use of technology wielded by specialists. From his perspective, the engineer's job was to help users take control of technology in order to prioritize the friendly, reciprocal relation between individuals and their environment. To Illich it was fundamental to "dissociate the increasing availability of technological tools which facilitate the encounter from the increasing control of the technocrat of what happens when people meet"[51].

In an interview with Kib Crosby in 1995, Felsenstein spoke about Illich's direct influence on his revolutionary work as a computational engineer and on his disruptive conception of the use of technology:

> My father had recently sent me a book called *Tools for Conviviality*, by Ivan Illich and published by Harper & Row. Illich (…) began writing books about de-schooling society, that was in 1970, and went on to establish some little center that he worked from in Cuernavaca, Mexico. He had a perspective that admitted technology and yet was

[44] L. Felsenstein, *The Golemic Approach,* In self-publication: On September 4, 2020 retrieved from http://www.leefelsenstein.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Golemic_Approach_MS.pdf.

[45] M. Clarà and E. BAarberà, Three problems with the connectivist conception of learning, *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 30 (2014), 197-206, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/jcal.12040.

[46] A. Kamenetz, *Edupunk, Edupreneurs, and the Coming Transformation of Higher Education*. Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2010.

[47] K. Olson, Review: Everywhere All the Time: A New Deschooling Reader, *The International Journal of Illich Studies*, 1 (1) (2010), 50-52, 52.

[48] W. Isaacson, *The Innovators: How a Group of Inventors, Hackers, Geniuses, and Geeks Created the Digital Revolution*, New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2014, 303.

[49] L. Felsenstein, Tom Swift Lives! *People's Computers Company*, 3 (2) (1974) pp. 14-15, 15.

[50] E. Petrick, Imagining the Personal Computer: Conceptualizations of the Homebrew Computer Club 1975–1977, *Annals of the History of Computing*, 39 (3) (2017), pp. 27-39, 29.

[51] I. Illich, op. cit., 1972, 102.

very much outside the industrial model of society. He described radio as a "convivial," as opposed to an "industrial" technology, and proceeded to describe basically the way I had learned radio, but from the standpoint of its penetration into the jungles of Central America. Two years after the introduction of radio in Central America, some people knew how to fix it. These people had always been there. They hadn't always known how to fix a radio, but the technology itself was sufficiently inviting and accessible to them that it catalyzed their inherent tendencies to learn. In other words, if you tried to mess around with it, it didn't just burn out right away. The tube might overheat, but it would survive and give you some warning that you had done something wrong. The possible set of interactions, between the person who was trying to discover the secrets of the technology and the technology itself, was quite different from the standard industrial interactive model, which could be summed up as "If you do the wrong thing, this will break, and God help you." So radio could and did, in effect, survive in that environment because it "grew up" a cohort of people around it who knew how to maintain and sustain it. And this showed me the direction to go in. You could do the same thing with computers as far as I was concerned[52].

In that way, Holt's homeschooling/unschooling and the portable computer technology tools whose genealogy can be traced back to Felsenstein hold a place of renown in the contemporary pedagogic imaginary. In both cases, in their initial deployment from marginalized spaces, Illich's ideas played a key role. Seen in perspective, one may say that these two subordinate spaces have, over time, become a reference point for thousands of families who, critical of official educational institutions, seek spaces for their children beyond school systems as well as for thousands of users who currently make use of computer applications and devices from portable devices. In a historical perspective, the two movements are where Illich's ideas reached their greatest extent.

3. Indigenous education and its integration with deschooling

On January 1, 1994, the same day Mexico joined the North American Free Trade Agreement with the United States and Canada, the Zapatatist National Liberation Army (EZLN) rose up in arms against Federal Army of Mexico and took seven municipal seats in the state of Chiapas[53] (Harvey, 1998). With this action, the indigenous peoples of southeast Mexico gave visibility to their centuries-old struggle for survival precisely on the date on which Mexico's governing class sought to celebrate Mexico's triumphant entry in the modern industrial economy. Following on John Holloway in his book Change the World Without Taking the Power, what was new to this indigenous uprising was the cry of "dissonance", in the middle of the neoliberal drift, that opened the possibility for political action based on new referents. The logic of social change was being challenged, in that "The starting point of

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[52] K. Crosby, Convivial Cybernetic Devices: From Vacuum Tube Flip-Flops to the Singing Altair. An Interview with Lee Felsenstein (Part 1). *The Analytical Engine*. 3 (1) (1995), retrieved from: https://web.archive.org/web/20140514123806/http://www.opencollector.org/history/homebrew/engv3n1.html.

[53] N. Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Lans and Democracy*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998.

theoretical reflection is opposition, negativity, struggle. It is from rage that though is born, not from the pose of reason, not from the reasoned-sitting-back-and-reflecting-on-the mysteries-of-existence that is the conventional image of 'the thinker'"[54].

Since its uprising, and especially since the breach of the 1996 San Andrés Larrainzar Agreements, the Zapatist movement has relied on a practice of resistance that includes rejecting government aid and advocating indigenous self-government. As Melissa M. Forbis notes, "refusal as a practice is not simply about rejecting material aid from the government, but also about rejecting the attendant practices of domination"[55]. In addition, the movement has broadened the bases of action of their requests, such that "the Zapatistas have been actively engaged in a process designed not only to unify the indigenous movement but to connect it with organizations and social movements in other sectors and to build up a broad coalition"[56]. These are aspects that characterize a movement with a decolonial dimension. As Boaventura de Souza Santos comments: "particularly after the Zapatists uprising (1994) and the World Social Forum (2001) […] the idea of abstract hierarchy among social struggles has undergone significant changes […] (this idea) is being replaced by the idea of situated and contextualized hierarchies and time frames"[57].

The Universidad de la Tierra (Uniterra) is an initiative that began in 2002 in the wake of the indigenous movement in the 1990s in southeast Mexico. One of its reference points is the philosophy of Ivan Illich and it considers that study must be the leisurely exercise of free peoples. Said another way, its activities do not conceive studying as the means to climb up the meritocracy pyramid of training courses, academic classes, attendance certificates and official diplomas. On its premises, as a principle, learning takes place without the need for teachers, curricula, students, textbooks, or diplomas. As Matthew Carlin notes: "*Unitierra* is organized and facilitated in a way that allows students to immediately benefit from their time there by immediately being engaged in specific kinds of vocational activities and collective, autonomous life.[58]". Any attempt to control the work of someone who is interested in learning is quickly stifled; learning processes always begin with the learner's interest.

In this regard, the main theses of *Deschooling Society* have a clear weight on how this space is organized:

> A good educational system should have three purposes: it should provide all who want to learn with access to available resources at any time in their lives; empower all who want to share what they know to find those who want to learn it from them; and, finally, furnish all who want to present an issue to the public with the opportunity to make their challenge known. Such a system would require the application of constitutional guarantees to education. Learners should not be forced to submit to an obligatory curriculum, or to discrimination based on whether they possess a certificate or a diploma. Nor should the public be forced to support, through a regressive taxation, a huge professional apparatus of educators and buildings which in fact restricts the public's chances for learning to the services the profession

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[54] J. Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power*, London: Pluto Press, 2002, 1.

[55] M. M. Forbis, After autonomy: the zapatistas, insurgent indigeneity, and decolonization. *Settler Colonial Studies*, 6 (4), (2016) pp 365-384, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2015.1090531

[56] H. Veltmeyer, The Dynamics of Social Change and Mexico's EZLN, *Latin American Perspectives*, 27 (5), (2000) pp. 88-110, 98.

[57] B. De Souza Santos, The Alternativa to Utopia Is Myopia. *Politics & Society*, 48 (4) (2020), pp. 567-584, 580. DOI: https://doi.org/10.177/00323920962644.

[58] M. Carlin, 'Amputating the State: Autonomy and La Universidad de la Tierra', in M. Carlin and J. Wallin (eds.), *Deleuze & Guattari: Politics and Education: For a People-Yet-To-Come* (pp. 165-183), NY: Bloomsbury Academicm 2014, 169.

is willing to put on the market. It should use modern technology to make free speech, free assembly, and a free press truly universal and, therefore, fully educational[59].

In direct contact with the region's indigenous communities in Oaxaca as well as in San Cristóbal de las Casas, the Universidad de la Tierra owns two headquarters where work dynamics converge with proposals for action. Gustavo Esteva has been in charge of the Oaxaca branch since 2022 whereas Raymundo Sánchez Barraza is the current coordinator of the Centro Indígena de Desarrollo y Capacitación Indígena (CIDESI)-Universidad de la Tierra- Chiapas: Ivan Illich, located on the old road that connected San Cristóbal de las Casas to San Juan Chamula. Esteva notes that the Universidad de la Tierra was born in Oaxaca "sprouting from the concern among indigenous communities when they wonder what to do when their young people who have never been to school have learned all they can in a community and still want to keep learning more"[60]. This is a complex matter, especially considering that places that traditionally offer teaching in Western societies, namely at schools, systematically deny admission at particular levels to those not in possession of a diploma or certificate of having passed a stipulated number of previous courses. Therefore, the Universidad de la Tierra is a project that addresses this concern of the region's indigenous communities to offer a space where one can learn without depending on a certificate to do so.

The Universidad de la Tierra does not have a hired faculty nor does it have officially enrolled students. It does not following a previously set curriculum, nor does it offer accredited diplomas. What it does, however, is to match up people who can teach something with others who are interested in learning that something. After this first contact, the learners can see how much help they need to keep progressing in a field of study or to enter a professional field. In this way, the influence of Illich's work, especially *Deschooling Society*, on the project is quite clear. Nevertheless, it should be stated that Deschooling Society makes no explicit mention of the indigenous cosmovision. Nothing indicates that Illich, despite living in Cuernavaca, in the state of Morelos, where there is a significant number of indigenous and peasant communities, had any interest in the alternative to the modern institutions that emanated from these communities. It thus fell to Esteva to reread Illich's work from the perspective of the indigenous movement that largely arose from the Zapatist uprising.

Esteva and Illich met in the 1980s. To Esteva, the idea that runs throughout Illich's work and has a renewed significance in the context of the indigenous communities' claims is that the struggle is not in the quest for political, economic, or cultural power but rather, in "putting every tool, every system, under the people's control, as an expression of freedom"[61]. In terms of education, this means, following Esteva's line of though:

> The glasses constructed for us by modern education severely distorted our perceptions of the experiences of people living at the grassroots. It was puzzling to also discover that those glasses, constructed to enrich and expand our vision beyond traditional provincialism, had

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[59] I. Illich, op. cit., 1972, 108.

[60] J. Igelmo Zaldívar, 'La Universidad de la Tierra en México. Una propuesta de aprendizaje convivencial', in J. L. Hernández Huerta, L. Sánchez Blanco and I. Pérez Miranda (eds.), *Temas y perspectiva sobre educación. La infancia ayer y hoy* (pp. 285-298), Salamanca: Globalia, 2009, 287.

[61] G. Esteva (2012). Regenerar el tejido social de la esperanza. *Revista de la Universidad Bolivariana*, 11 (33) (2012), 175-194, 188.

actually imprisoned us in the more severe prisons of modernity; with the global provincialism of certainties published and promulgated world-wide by the "experts", including economics, political theorists and professional educators[62].

In its theoretical dimension, the Universidad de la Tierra experience is connected to a criticism of modernity from the indigenous cosmovision. This line of study, taking Illich's work as a reference, has also been explored by Chris Beeman, who has pointed out that "Illich identified what he thought of as the cult of education that separated whole nations from their traditional patterns of living. (…) Those more marginal, considered within this formal structure of education, became even more so. This coincided with moving from subsistence poverty to 'modernized poverty'"[63]. Thus, in both theoretical and his propositional dimension, Illich is an author whose ideas converge on the postulates of contemporary decolonial theory. This holds equally true for notions stated by George J. Sefa Dei and Cristina Sherry Kaimungal, who note that "while decolonization is about the power of nonhegemonic thinking and the transformative ideas we seek to engage with, an anti-colonial prism helps connect our thinking processes and thoughts with concrete political practice"[64]. It is essential to underscore that Illich placed particular emphasis on the need to build institutional alternatives that turn away from hegemonic models and model a different discourse based on new epistemological referents to reconstruct the relation between education and schooling. From this perspective, *Deschooling Society* contains a decolonial epistemology that turns away from industrial modernity with its hegemonic aspirations.

Conclusions

This decolonial reading of Illich we have suggested at the end of the paper was in fact articulated previously by leading authors such as Walter Mignolo and Boaventura de Souza Santos. In an interview with Facundo Giuliano and Daniel Berisso, Mignolo himself takes Deschooling Society as a reference to theorize on the relationship between education and decolonization. Specifically, Mignolo emphasizes Illich's opening lines in the book: "Many students, especially those who are poor, intuitively know what the schools do for them. They school them to confuse process and substance. Once these become blurred, a new logic is assumed"[65]. To Mignolo, Illich's book has a clear continuity with decolonial pedagogy that, from the Argentine philosopher's perspective, aims to "instruct students to understand, see and become aware of the coloniality of power everyday life and in their bodies"[66]. For his part, Boaventura de Souza Santos, also during an interview, mentioned the major influence Illich had directly on his intellectual development, made evident by de Souza Santos's trips to the CIDOC in Cuernavaca between 1963 and 1976[67].

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[62] G. Esteva and M. S. Prakash, *Grassroots Post-Modernism. Remaking the soil of cultures*, London, UK: Zed Books, 1998, 79.

[63] C. Beeman, From Scarcity to Abundance: Illich's Educational Critique and Indigenous Learning, *Espacio, Tiempo y Educación*, *9*(1) (2022), pp. 69-82, 80, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.14516/ ete.515.

[64] G. J. Sefa Dei and C. S. Kaimungal, 'Indigeneity and Decolonial Resistance: An introduction', in G. J. Sefa Dei and C. S. Kaimungal (eds.), *Indigeneity and Decolonial Resistance. Alternatives to Colonial Thinking and Practice* (pp. 1-14), Gorham, ME: Myers Education Press, 2018, 2.

[65] F. Giuliano and D. Berisso, Educación y decolonialidad: aprender a desaprender para poder re-aprender. Un diálogo geopolítico-pedagógico con Walter Mignolo, *Revista del IICE*, 35, 61-70 (2014), 61.

[66] Ibid., 63.

[67] B. S. Martins and B. De Souza Santos, Socialismo, democracia e epistemologías do Soul. Entrevista com Boaventura de Sousa Santos. *Revista Crítica de Ciêncisa Sociais*, Special 40th anniversary issue (2018), 9-54.

Indeed, hoping to halt the spread of the dominant institutional model in the field of education, Illich sharply criticized the endeavors of schools in the developed world. At the same time, he proposed a set of alternatives that he in principle deemed feasible in the early 1970s. He proposed commencing an exercise of deconstructing the relationship between schools and education so as "to develop a language in which we can speak about school without such constant recourse to education"[68]. As John Baldacchino phrased it, what Illich was insistent upon was that "what is immanent to knowledge is not the school, but the relationship between person and society, freedom and conviviality"[69]. And all these theoretical elements open the door to a decolonial reading of Illich's work.

This theoretical framework is a suitable place to situate attempts to put Illich's ideas into practice over the fifty years since *Deschooling Society* was published. It is a topic scarcely explored so far by those who have taken interest in Illich's work in recent years. The different experiences analyzed in this paper beg to be studied in context and at the same time, they propitiate taking a deeper look into the development that specific ideas have had based on their being put into practice. Despite the fact that Illich himself, on more than one occasion, showed little interest in those who sought to implement some of his ideas in specific endeavors, these initiatives should not be ignored by those of us who study education in its historical and theoretical dimension.

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[68] I. Illich, op. cit., 1972, 38.
[69] J. Baldacchino, op. cit, 2020, 145.

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