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The question of pedagogical purpose and aims in contemporary consumer society

Abstract: This theoretical paper discusses the purpose and aims of education in the era of consumerism. We argue that pedagogy, understood as an autonomous descriptive-normative science, is the only discipline entitled to define the purpose and aims of education. This argument is developed in three steps. First, we ground the question of educational purpose in the ontological status of the human being. Education is understood as a formative process (*Bildung*) through which human beings understand, realise and transcend themselves; therefore, its aim should not be set externally by economic or political demands but should arise from the idea of the human as a free, moral and self-transcending subject. Second, we reaffirm the epistemological autonomy of pedagogy. Pedagogy is not a value-neutral practical field but a science that unites descriptive analyses of educational reality with normative guidance about what education should achieve. On this basis, it possesses both the right and the responsibility to articulate educational purpose and aims. Third, we offer a theoretical analysis of consumerism as a pedagogical problem. We argue that consumerism displaces pedagogical teleology by redefining education as a market service focused on performance, employability and competitiveness. This educational reality replaces value-led reason with instrumental rationality and reduces education to adaptation and production. We claim that this represents not only a crisis in education but also a crisis of education itself. This theoretical paper thus provides a pedagogical-theoretical view of consumerism as a force that undermines the very conditions of education as human formation.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, educational normativity, educational purpose, educational aim, humanistic education, pedagogical theory

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Introduction – the ontological foundation of pedagogical teleology and the question of what defines a human

Due to the theoretical nature of this paper, we defend the pedagogical purpose and aims of education through three separate yet connected lines of critical enquiry. We begin with an analysis of the ontological grounding of pedagogical thought, showing that every conception of education presupposes a philosophical understanding of the human being as a self-interpreting and self-transcending subject. Second, we address the epistemological and descriptive-normative nature of pedagogy as an autonomous science of education. Finally, using the above-mentioned framework, we pedagogically analyse the crisis of pedagogical purpose and aims under contemporary consumerism.

Every pedagogical theory is grounded in the idea of *man* and a vision of *his purpose*. In this section, therefore, we analyse the ontological basis of pedagogical teleology as a link between *being* and *ought-to-be* in humans. Pedagogy's legitimacy in defining educational purpose and aims stems not from any social or political programme but from its own reflection on the essence of man. Pedagogical purpose and aims therefore regard education as a process through which humans understand, realise and fulfil themselves. Without pedagogical purpose and aims in education, pedagogy remains suspended between instrumental function and moral emptiness. This is why Biesta states that educational purpose has been displaced by the language of learning outcomes and skills, thereby neglecting the ontological dimension of becoming (Biesta 2005, pp. 58–60). A return to pedagogical teleology reaffirms that education concerns not merely *what one knows or does* but *who one becomes* (Biesta 2005, 2014; Hentig 2007; Komar 2008, 2017; Noddings 2018). As Komar asserts, the purposefulness of education is inseparable from the idea of man because one cannot be thought of without the other. With this, Komar implies that education necessarily presupposes an understanding of what it means to be human and that this idea of the human being is realised in its practical form precisely through education. Education's meaning therefore depends on its ontological grounding. In this sense, pedagogically, to educate someone is to act within the horizon of the human being as a becoming, purposive and self-transcending existence (Komar 2017, pp. 47–60).

The idea that human existence is teleological is not a contemporary idea; it originated in Aristotle's conception of nature (*physis*) when Aristotle stated that every being acts for an end, and this end is its good (Aristotel 1988, pp. 8–10). The human good is *eudaimonia*, or flourishing, which is achieved through the realisation of our rational and moral capacities. Education, viewed in this sense, is the formative process by which potentiality (*dynamis*) becomes actuality (*energeia*) (Pejović 1988, pp. XXII–XXXV). This Aristotelian schema is pedagogical in its demand because it views education not as the external imposition of knowledge but as the unfolding of inherent form. As Komar points out following this logic, education is not an addition to man but is becoming what he already is in his possibility (Komar 2017).

Thus, the ontological core of what we propose as pedagogical purpose and aims lies in recognising the *formative teleology* of the human being, in which education is not utility but actuality, the realisation of one's own essence. Standish similarly argues that the point of education lies not in its instrumental benefits but in its contribution to human self-understanding and moral agency. To treat education merely as a means, he warns, is to forget that its end is the human being themselves (Standish 2005). Whereas Aristotle understands teleology as immanent to *physis*, where purposes are revealed through mind (*nous*) as the unfolding of inherent form towards its good (*aletheia*), Kant relocates teleology from nature to practical reason. In Kant's philosophy, educational purpose does not arise from natural ends but from the normative demands of freedom and moral self-legislation. Kant locates teleology exactly within human freedom, and education is the means by which nature brings about the development of man's moral vocation. »Man can only become man by education. He is merely what education makes of him,« he writes, because education leads him from natural inclination to moral autonomy (Rink 1906, p. 6). Komar interprets this Kantian position as the foundation for a transcendental pedagogy in which the pedagogical subject is simultaneously empirical and intelligible, bound by necessity yet orientated towards freedom (Komar 2024, pp. 11–15). Here, teleology is not external but internal, and the *ought* arises from reason itself. Education is therefore a moral ontology, the formation of a being capable of self-legislation. In this respect, we theorise that pedagogy occupies a unique position between ethics and anthropology because it translates the moral idea of freedom into the historical process of formation (*Bildung*). Wilhelm Dilthey historicises this process with the claim that man is a being who interprets his own existence through culture and meaning. Pedagogy, as a *Geisteswissenschaft*, therefore seeks understanding (*Verstehen*) rather than causal explanation; that is, it interprets educational phenomena in terms of meaning and value rather than reducing them to causal laws and empirical regularities (Dilthey 2002). For Dilthey, education is a historical act through which humanity reproduces and transforms itself. The *idea of man* is not fixed but historically mediated, and every epoch redefines what it means to be human and what education should aim to achieve. Considering this, pedagogy must constantly reinterpret its purpose but still retain its normative orientation towards *the human as such*. Palekčić and Komar explicitly draw on this hermeneutic insight when describing pedagogy as a systematic

and self-grounded science of education capable of interpreting both the empirical and value dimensions of human formation (Komar 2008, 2015; Palekčić 2015). The ontological premise is that education, like human existence, is historical yet oriented towards universality. Framed in this way, pedagogical teleology does not dictate which life to lead but rather secures the conditions of leading one's life as a person, which is precisely the horizon Komar links to autonomy and moral responsibility. Palekčić argues that pedagogical theory must rest on an image of man as a person capable of self-transcendence and value orientation (Palekčić 2015). Education, therefore, is the intentional cultivation of personhood, not the production of competencies. Komar reformulates this in explicitly ontological terms: the human being is a being of possibility who exists as a task to himself. The *purposefulness of education* arises from this ontological incompleteness. The individual is not a finished essence but a project of becoming; thus, education is both a response to and an expression of its being. Only by grounding educational purpose and aims in the nature of the human being can pedagogy resist the reduction of education to external goals, economic productivity, employability or adaptability. This ontological foundation, Komar insists, gives pedagogy its authority to define educational purposes and aims (Komar 2017).

The ontological conception of purpose provides the criterion for specifying educational aims. As Kakuk notes, contemporary pedagogy often suffers from aims that are too wide and too general, detached from both the human person and practical realisation (Kakuk 2020, p. 49). Her analysis shows that the specification of educational aims requires a dialectic between the general and the particular, mainly between the ideal of human formation and its realisation in curriculum and practice. From an ontological standpoint, this specification must begin with an understanding of human nature (Kakuk 2020). Now, it becomes necessary to distinguish between the purpose and aims of education. By purpose, we refer to the ultimate teleological goal of education. Therefore, educational purpose is the reason why education ought to exist at all. Purpose is rooted in an ontological and moral conception of the human being as a free, self-transcending and responsible subject and is universal and non-instrumental. In contrast, aims are the historically and pedagogically specified articulations of that purpose within concrete educational practice. Aims translate the general horizon of human formation into curricular, didactic and institutional orientations. What is meant to be cultivated, in whom and by which means? The purpose of education grounds its legitimacy, while its aims determine its pedagogical articulation. When this hierarchy is reversed, when aims are defined independently of purpose, educational practice becomes fragmented into operational outcomes, competences and performances without a unifying account of the human being to whom these outcomes are supposed to belong (ibid.). Vukasović therefore distinguished educational aims according to key dimensions of a human being – intellectual, moral, physical, labour and aesthetic – arguing that, together, they pedagogically constitute the *wholeness of man* (Vukasović 1999, p. 135). This echoes Aristotle's notion of virtue as the harmony of faculties and Komar's insistence on integral human development. However, as Palekčić, Komar and Kakuk sought to demonstrate, without pedagogical grounding, such curricular

structures risk fragmentation. When educational aims are treated merely as operational outcomes, the pedagogical idea of man dissolves into functional skills that one should possess. This ontological conception of education, grounded in the idea of man as a self-transcending being, inevitably confronts the dominant logic of contemporary society, where purpose is no longer understood as self-realisation but as performative utility.

Understanding education as ontological self-realisation exposes the fundamental opposition between pedagogical and market teleology. The market conceives of purpose as external utility, while pedagogical theory conceives it as internal fulfilment. When consumerist ideology colonises education, it replaces the question of being with the imperative of performance (Miliša 2023). As Komar writes: »In this newly arisen situation, speaking about the purposiveness of anything including education and upbringing, appears 'outdated' or at least no longer self-evident. (Komar 2017, p. 48) Similarly, Giroux warns that neoliberalism redefines the citizen as a consumer and the teacher as a technician, eroding the ethical space of pedagogy (Giroux 2014, 2020). The ontological foundation of education thus becomes a critical act to defend the human as an end in itself. The ontological foundation of pedagogical teleology and the idea of man ground the entire structure of pedagogical thought. To educate is to participate in the being of man as an open, self-transcending project. Aristotle provided the metaphysical form of this teleology through an immanent conception of becoming, while Kant rearticulated teleology within the framework of practical reason and moral autonomy. Dilthey situated it historically, and Komar united Aristotelian, Kantian, and Diltheyan accounts of teleology into a coherent ontology of education as *human self-realisation through freedom*. In this pedagogical framework, the purpose and aims of education are not adaptation but actualisation, not fitting the person into the world but, as Komar says, enabling the world to appear through the person. The pedagogical act thus becomes an ontological meeting of freedom and formation, being and becoming, ideal and real. Grounded in this ontology, pedagogy reclaims the authority to define its purpose and aims, resisting the reduction of the human to the measurable and the marketable. The purposefulness of education, when founded in the pedagogically grounded *idea of man*, is both its origin and its destiny.

Reaffirmation of pedagogy as an autonomous descriptive-normative science of education

The question of purpose and aims in education is not merely an ontological pedagogical concern but also an epistemological one. Contemporary educational discourse, increasingly influenced by market logic and economic rationality, seeks to displace pedagogical normativity by shifting from a pedagogically grounded purpose to measuring what education delivers and produces. To prevent this alienation of education, pedagogy must be reaffirmed as an autonomous descriptive-normative science of education. This autonomy does not imply complete isolation from other humanistic and social sciences but shows a dis-

tinctive epistemological status in which pedagogy interprets educational phenomena through autonomous pedagogical categories. As Friesen and Su argue, pedagogy is an autonomous normative discipline with its own forms of theorising (Friesen and Su 2023, pp. 6–28). To speak of pedagogy as an autonomous field thus means to affirm that its principles arise from its own subject matter. Komar articulates this autonomy by defining pedagogy as »a systematic and self-grounded science of education« (Komar 2008, p. 128); that is, it cannot be subordinated to the empirical or policy-driven demands of other disciplines. This autonomy, which originated in Herbart's idea of education, is further supported by the early *Geisteswissenschaftliche* tradition, in which many authors already distinguished pedagogy from psychology and sociology by its interpretive and normative orientation. Pedagogy, they argue, is a science of its own kind, since its object – education – cannot be reduced to causal explanation and requires understanding in light of values and meanings (Noddings 2018; Vujčić 2013). Such an approach lays the foundations for the contemporary rethinking of pedagogy as an autonomous, value-laden, hermeneutically grounded discipline.

Considering educational phenomena as historical, cultural and moral expressions of human life, pedagogical enquiry must both interpret their meanings and evaluate them in light of ideals. As Dilthey put it: »The categorial relations that are distinctive of the system of the conceptual cognition of what is the case are reality, thing, qualities, states, action, and being acted on. This cognition of what is the case constitutes the foundation for all value-determinations.« (Dilthey 2002, p. 318) Brezinka formulated his metatheory of education based on this hermeneutic principle. He distinguishes but also connects three levels of pedagogical reasoning: the descriptive, the normative-philosophical, and the technological-practical. For Brezinka, it is evident that pedagogical theory must ask questions: »Which educational aims are pursued by whom, when, where and under what circumstances? What do these educational aims mean? On what basic norms do they depend? What relation do they have to the given historical situation and to particular interpretations of this situation?« (Brezinka 1992, p. 89) The descriptive study of educational reality thus remains incomplete unless it is grounded in normative reflection on values and aims. In this context of the descriptive-normative character of pedagogy, the critical theory of society, as formulated by Max Horkheimer, can also be helpful in formulating the autonomous demand for pedagogy as a descriptive-normative science of education. Like Brezinka's metatheory, it refuses to separate reality explanations and normative reflections. Critical theory seeks not only to *explain* social and educational phenomena but also to *transform* them. Its emancipatory interest presupposes the autonomy of pedagogy in defining normative aims, as knowledge is not value-neutral but oriented towards human freedom and self-determination (Horkheimer 1972). In this sense, both Brezinka's metatheoretical model and critical theory affirm that pedagogical enquiry must unite description, praxis and the pursuit of emancipation. Palekčić synthesises these traditions by defining pedagogical theory as a triadic structure: descriptive, interpretative and normative. According to Palekčić, the object of pedagogical knowledge is education itself, which is inherently value-laden and teleological (Palekčić 2015). Consequently,

pedagogy cannot be a neutral science. It must both understand the educational process as it occurs and critically determine what it ought to become (Miliša 2023).

The descriptive (explanatory) dimension of pedagogy that involves the interpretive analysis of educational realities is grounded in observation, historical enquiry and phenomenological description. Yet, as Avram and Budui note, scientificity in educational sciences requires not only internal consistency but also an axiological orientation. They state: »In agreement with the first epistemological criterion of knowledge formation in Science Education, we must signal the importance and relevance of the explanatory force, or of prediction of theories in this field of knowledge; their power to generate new research bringing about, in their turn, additional knowledge.« (Avram and Budui 2013, p. 768) After explaining and describing educational reality, the normative dimension must address the teleological question of what education should achieve? Brezinka and Palekčić state that pedagogical norms are not arbitrary but arise from the conception of the human being as a moral and social subject. Both dimensions are dialectically related, as descriptive understanding grounds the possibility of normative ideals, while normative reflection gives meaning and direction to descriptive enquiry (Brezinka 1992; Palekčić 2015). The critical tendency to rethink both is what establishes pedagogy as an autonomous science of education, distinct from purely empirical social sciences and prescriptive ideology. Understanding is not a methodological technique but a dialogical event in which meaning arises between tradition and the interpreter. In this sense, pedagogical enquiry participates in a hermeneutic circle in which it interprets educational reality from within the horizon of values that simultaneously shape and are shaped by that reality. Such reflexive rationality distinguishes pedagogical knowledge from both positivist explanation and ideological prescription because it is always interpretive, critical and self-aware.

In reaffirming pedagogical autonomy, we must also question whether education is a public good or private interest. Nussbaum argues that democratic societies require education that cultivates critical imagination and empathy rather than mere economic productivity (Nussbaum 2010). Biesta similarly contends that pedagogy sustains the public dimension of education by keeping open the question of what constitutes the common good (Biesta 2005, 2014). Pedagogical normativity thus resists both technocratic control and political instrumentalisation by insisting that education remains a space of ethical and democratic formation. As Giroux and Apple argue, neoliberal corporative consumerism subordinates education to the imperatives of capital, thereby eroding its democratic and emancipatory potential. Thus, pedagogy's autonomy functions as a critical safeguard in this process, as it insists that the goals of education must emerge from pedagogical reflection on the human condition, not from external systems of value (Apple 2013; Giroux 2020). With this in mind, we suggest that it is precisely pedagogy that remains the only legitimate discipline responsible for questioning *why* we educate, not merely *how*. Pedagogy affirms, as Komar notes, that the final cause (*causa finalis*) of education lies exactly in the unity of the purpose of education and the idea of man (Komar 2017). Habermas also discusses this in his theory of knowledge-constitutive interests when acknowledging that ped-

agogical enquiry embodies the practical interest in mutual understanding and the emancipatory interest in autonomy (Habermas 1988). By articulating both, pedagogy positions itself as the only discipline legitimately entitled to formulate the normative foundations of education.

To conceptualise pedagogy as an autonomous descriptive-normative science is to restore its rightful epistemological and ethical place within the field of knowledge. Pedagogy describes educational reality through interpretive understanding, but it also prescribes educational purpose through critical reflection on values and ends. Its autonomy is grounded not in separation but in the pure pedagogical specificity of two important questions: What does it mean to educate, and what should education aim for? Therefore, the pedagogical act is a moral encounter between freedom and formation. By uniting its descriptive, interpretive and normative dimensions, pedagogy asserts itself as the science that mediates between being and ought, knowledge and value, freedom and responsibility, thereby safeguarding the human purpose of education against the reductions of market rationality. Consequently, only pedagogy that maintains both its descriptive and normative integrity can legitimately determine the purpose and aims of education in contemporary society.

Pedagogy and the consumerist displacement of educational purpose and aims

Within the autonomous descriptive-normative framework set out in the previous two sections, we articulate that contemporary education stands at a pedagogical paradox. Never has humanity invested so much in education, learning technologies and human capital, yet never has the question of education's purpose and aims been more obscure. The dominant language of contemporary pedagogy, which includes terms such as efficiency, skills, competences, outcomes and employability, has rejected the humanistic and moral dimensions of education (Spasenovski 2023). What remains is no longer *education* with the pedagogical purpose and aims we discussed earlier in this paper but an alienated antithesis of a system that manages learning without pedagogical questioning of why or towards what ends. Therefore, we state that education in contemporary society exists as a form but not as a purpose. It exists in the form of education in a sense that represents a radical *displacement of pedagogical teleology*, replacing the reflective, normative and ontological aims of pedagogy with consumerist, economically grounded purpose and aims. While it undoubtedly assigns functions and outcomes to education, these do not constitute pedagogical purpose and aims in a normative sense, since they are externally imposed, instrumental and disconnected from reflection on human formation. Drawing on the frameworks established in the previous sections of this paper, this argument proceeds from three theoretical claims: (1) the purpose and aims of education are ontologically grounded in the idea of man as a free, moral and self-transcending being; (2) pedagogy, as an autonomous descriptive-normative science, possesses the right to define those purposes and aims; and (3) the contemporary consumerist paradigm

usurps this right by externalising educational purpose and aims into economic and performative categories, thus annihilating its humanistic foundation.

Consumerism is much more than a system of production and consumption. It is a cultural ontology that redefines human identity through acquisition and performance (Spasenovski 2024). Bauman called this condition *liquid modernity*, in which human beings are no longer formed but constantly reshaped to fit the market's flexible demand (Bauman 2007). In this context, consumerism constitutes not merely a sociocultural or historical phenomenon but a pedagogical problem that is barely analysed within pedagogical theory (Spasenovski 2024). Consumerism undermines the pedagogical purpose and aims of educational thought. It reshapes how pedagogy understands its object by subordinating pedagogical categories such as formation, purpose and value to economic and market logics. As a result, contemporary pedagogy no longer reflects on what it means to educate a human being *but measures* how efficiently learning outcomes can be produced. From this point of view, we pedagogically define consumerism not as an external historical or sociocultural phenomenon that influences education but as an alienation of pedagogical reason, which leads to replacing understanding (*Verstehen*) with measurement and formation (*Bildung*) with production. Therefore, to treat consumerism pedagogically means to describe how it transforms the very conditions under which pedagogical meaning, purpose, aims and truth are constituted.

In consumer society, education ceases to be an ethical or philosophical endeavour and becomes a service industry that manufactures adaptability and productivity. In neoliberal consumerist discourse, the subject of education is not the *person* but the *entrepreneurial self*. As Brown writes: »In recent years, this premise has given way to a formulation of education as primarily valuable to human capital development, where human capital is what the individual, the business world, and the state seek to enhance in order to maximize competitiveness.« (Brown 2015, p. 176) Schools and universities are reshaped as *learning enterprises*, students as *customers* and teachers as *service providers*. This change in educational reality brings about a profound ontological shift in which education no longer aims at human flourishing but at *market performance*. Giroux thus rightfully observes that neoliberalism strips education of its moral and political responsibilities (Giroux 2020). Marginson notes that »the global higher education sector now operates under the logic of *academic capitalism*, where research and teaching are subsumed under knowledge production for profit« (Marginson 2012, pp. 354-355). He argues that while neoliberal reforms have made universities more competitive, corporatised and business-like, true capitalist markets in higher education are impossible because knowledge and research are public goods (Marginson 2012, 2022). In addition, Apple and McLaren argue that the neoliberal restructuring of schooling has turned education into a site of cultural production and consumption, where institutions compete for students as clients and knowledge becomes a branded commodity. The discourse of innovation, performance and employability replaces the moral and intellectual purpose of education with the vocabulary of promotion and customer satisfaction. Educational institutions now operate as enterprises managing their reputation

capital, while pedagogical values are subordinated to visibility, ranking and marketability. In such conditions, education ceases to be a public good orientated towards human development and becomes an instrument for sustaining consumer desire and corporate legitimacy (Apple 2013; McLaren 2002, 2015). The pedagogical purpose and aims of education are consequently marginalised because they cannot be commodified. The commodification of education manifests itself in the market's redefinition of educational value, in which the purpose and aims of education are no longer grounded in understanding or self-realisation but in the exchange value of a diploma within the labour market. This means that an educated person in this anti-pedagogical, consumerist view becomes a competitive asset within the labour market, not a self-fulfilled, self-realised and reflective being. The purpose and aims of education, which should be defined by pedagogically grounded ideals of autonomy, truth and good, have been replaced by *value-added productivity*. This change describes a deeper transformation not only within education but also in pedagogy itself. This ontological transformation of education therefore produces an epistemological shift as instrumental rationality replaces pedagogical understanding as the dominant mode of educational reasoning. What was once guided by the pursuit of values and meaning is now governed by calculation and utility. It substitutes pedagogical value-led reason with economically instrumental reason in education. This substitution of approaches is what we see as the epistemological crisis of education in consumer society, as it alters the very criteria of what counts as valid educational knowledge and rational justification, replacing pedagogical reflection on meaning, purpose and human formation with instrumental calculation and utility as the dominant epistemic standards. When Weber distinguished between these two forms of reason, he stated that instrumental rationality seeks the most efficient means for a given end, while value rationality questions whether the end itself is worth pursuing (Weber 1978). It is evident that pedagogy belongs to the latter domain because it asks not merely *how* to educate but *why*. Under consumerism, however, instrumental rationality has dominated the field of education as it seeks optimisation, measurement and management, yet the question of true meaning is excluded from this process. As Horkheimer and Adorno warned in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, when reason becomes purely instrumental, it loses its emancipatory power and turns into domination (Horkheimer and Adorno 1989). Adorno later deepened this concern in *Education after Auschwitz*, arguing that the ultimate task of education is to prevent the recurrence of barbarism by cultivating the capacity for self-reflection, empathy and moral awareness. Education, for Adorno, cannot be reduced to the efficient transmission of knowledge or the acquisition of skills because it must sustain the possibility of critical subjectivity against the pressures of conformity and adaptation (Adorno 2006). When education serves the logic of production rather than the formation of conscience, it ceases to be education in the humanistic sense and becomes a practice of adjustment to the existing order. Adorno described this condition as half-education (*Halbbildung*), where the ideal of *Bildung* as self-formation gives way to the acquisition of adaptable skills and cultural capital. What appears as education becomes a simulacrum of learning, detached from reflection and moral growth

(Adorno 2006). Within consumerism, this half-education concept aligns perfectly with the logic of instrumental rationality as it produces functional market-ready subjects, not autonomous persons. What appears to be rational progress is, in truth, a regression into a world where education becomes indistinguishable from training. In this way, education is made to serve market needs rather than the human individual. Miliša identifies this lack of value-led reason in pedagogy as a true crisis in education (Miliša 2023). When aims are specified solely through policy instruments or economic indicators, they lose their philosophical and pedagogical coherence, and they become functional goals of adaptation rather than expressions of human possibility (Kakuk 2020).

Therefore, the consumerist model undermines the pedagogical foundations of education in at least three ways: (1) it erases the idea of the human as an end in itself, (2) it fragments the pedagogical concept of the person, and (3) it displaces pedagogy's moral purpose and humanistic aims with a market logic that no longer asks what kind of person one should become *but rather* how efficiently one can perform within the volatility of the market. These observations are in line with Fromm's observation that consumer society replaces being with having, turning human existence into accumulation, or with Marcuse's idea of a one-dimensional man (Fromm 2004; Marcuse 1968). In these anti-pedagogical realities, the educated self becomes a brand, measured by its social capital. Once education became a form without pedagogical purpose and aims, it became an alienated process with the purpose and aims directed at external ends. Following Kant's thought, Komar emphasises that education educates man himself, not for something outside him (Komar 2024). Pedagogy in this context remains foundational because, in praxis, it views education as the path to emancipation. Freire, Giroux, McLaren and other critical pedagogy theorists insist that any kind of dehumanisation is not an abstract condition but a historical one; therefore, the role of critical pedagogy is to describe, understand and restore education as a dialogical process of becoming (Spasenovski 2023). Similarly, Biesta argues for a *pedagogy of subjectification* in which education brings the individual into relation with the world as a responsible agent: »Subjectification is not about responsibility but about freedom.« (Biesta 2020, p. 101) Therefore, reaffirmation of the necessity to pedagogically consider the purpose of education in the consumerist era is imperative for confronting anti-pedagogical half-education as a form that became dominant in consumerism.

In this paper, we described why pedagogical theory must resist reduction to social or economic function, since such reduction destroys the autonomy of educational purpose. The current educational system should not be described as a crisis *within* education but as a crisis *of* education itself. Pedagogy, understood thus, must once again rethink its autonomous, descriptive-normative claim for reaffirmation of the pedagogical purpose and aims of contemporary education. This critical renewal also demands institutional courage. Universities and schools must defend their autonomy from economic imperatives, reorientating research and teaching towards the cultivation of judgment, imagination and solidarity.

When pedagogy's descriptive-normative authority is replaced by instrumental reason, education ceases to exist as an act of formation and becomes a mechanism of adaptation. Education must once again become the space where humanity reflects upon itself, not its market value, where knowledge serves wisdom, not utility, and where formation precedes performance. To educate, in the full pedagogical sense, is to affirm the dignity of man as both the *subject* and the *purpose* of all education.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to theoretically and critically reaffirm pedagogy as an autonomous descriptive-normative science grounded in the idea of the human being as a self-interpreting, free and moral subject and to demonstrate that the legitimacy to define the purpose and aims of education arises from this foundation. The central claim maintained throughout the argument is that education is not a technical operation, a service activity or a market product but a formative process through which the human being comes to understand, realise and transcend itself. Accordingly, the reasoning unfolded through three inter-related lines of enquiry that converged in the defence of pedagogy against its instrumental deformation. First, the ontological grounding of pedagogical teleology was established. Every pedagogical theory, either explicit or implicit, rests upon a conception of man and a vision of his purpose. Education was therefore interpreted as the process of self-formation (*Bildung*) in which the subject actualises its inherent potential and moral vocation. Therefore, in this paper, we argue that the purpose and aims of education cannot be imposed externally but must emerge from the very nature of the human being. Second, this ontological analysis was complemented by the epistemological reaffirmation of pedagogy as an autonomous descriptive-normative science of education. Pedagogical knowledge, unlike empirical or policy-driven enquiry, unites description and prescription because it interprets educational reality while normatively orienting it towards values and ends. Such autonomy does not imply separation from other sciences but designates pedagogy's distinctive epistemic status of a science that interprets education through its own categories of meaning, purpose and value. Its scientific legitimacy therefore depends on maintaining the dialectical unity between what education *is* and what it *ought to be*. At the end of this paper, we offered a critical diagnosis of the crisis of educational purpose in the era of consumerism. We demonstrated that under neoliberal and consumerist rationality, education has been transformed into a marketing activity and an instrument of adaptation. Knowledge is commodified, institutions are restructured as enterprises and students are redefined as customers. The moral and humanistic foundations of education are displaced by the language of performance, competitiveness and employability. The replacement of value-led by instrumental rationality marks not only the alienation of education but also an epistemological crisis within pedagogy itself. In conclusion, the argument advanced in this paper reaf-

firms that only pedagogy as an autonomous, descriptive-normative and critical science of education can legitimately define the purpose and aims of education. By grounding its enquiry in the ontological understanding of the human being and maintaining its epistemological integrity, pedagogy defends education from reduction to external utility.

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VPRAŠANJE PEDAGOŠKEGA NAMENA IN CILJA V SODOBNI POTROŠNIŠKI DRUŽBI

Povzetek: Ta teoretični članek obravnava vprašanje namena in cilja vzgoje in izobraževanja v dobi potrošništva. Pedagogika, razumljena kot avtonomna deskriptivno-normativna veda, je edina disciplina, ki lahko opredeljuje namene in cilje vzgoje in izobraževanja. Razprava je razdeljena na tri dele. Najprej vprašanje namena vzgoje in izobraževanja utemeljimo v ontološkem statusu človeka. Vzgojo in izobraževanje razumemo kot oblikovanje (*Bildung*), s pomočjo katerega človek razume, uresničuje in presega samega sebe; zato cilj vzgoje in izobraževanja ne sme biti določen na podlagi zunanjih, gospodarskih ali političnih interesov, ampak mora izhajati iz ideje o človeku kot svobodnem, moralnem in samopresegajočem subjektu. Nato poudarimo epistemološko avtonomnost pedagogike. Pedagogika ni vrednotno nevtralna, praktično področje, temveč veda, ki združuje opisno analizo vzgojno-izobraževalne resničnosti z normativnimi smernicami o tem, kaj naj bi vzgoja in izobraževanje dosegla. Na tej podlagi ima pravico in odgovornost, da opredeli izobraževalne cilje in namene. Tretjič, predstavljamo teoretično analizo potrošništva kot pedagoškega problema. Trdimo, da potrošništvo izpodriva pedagoško teleologijo, saj vzgojo in izobraževanje na novo opredeljuje kot tržno storitev, usmerjeno v doseganje rezultatov, zaposljivost in konkurenčnost. Ta izobraževalna resničnost nadomešča vrednotno usmerjen razum z instrumentalno usmerjeno racionalnostjo in izobraževanje skrči na prilagajanje in produkcijo. Trdimo, da to ne predstavlja le določene krize v vzgoji in izobraževanju, ampak kar krizo izobraževanja samega. Ta razprava tako ponuja pedagoško-teoretični pogled na potrošništvo kot na silo, ki spodkopava pogoje vzgoje in izobraževanja v funkciji oblikovanja človeka.

Gljučne besede: kritična pedagogika, vzgojno-izobraževalna normativnost, vzgojno-izobraževalni namen, vzgojno-izobraževalni cilj, humanistično izobraževanje, pedagoška teorija

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