CHAPTER IX

THE EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL DISTRICT

PURPOSES AND SIZE OF THE DISTRICT

The reasons for such a district

Several times during the preceding chapter we suggested the necessity for a unit grouping the services and harmonizing the activities of the various institutions which form part of the educational system. It is this unit, this flexible and integrated body of educational services which we shall examine here more closely, under the name of an educational and cultural district.

It is the basic constituent element of education which has become the "plan of the whole of society with its schools, but also with its means of production and of transport, its multiple methods of communication and the organized, diversified and articulate mass of its free citizens".

As a foundation for an educational service, it offers to the whole population of the geographical area which it serves, the entire range of educational and cultural courses possible within the framework of compulsory schooling and permanent education (excluding however university courses as such).

It is responsible for providing pre-school education, common syllabus and optional courses in basic education (considered here as concerning children between 6 and 16), and all the courses offered between the end of compulsory schooling and the start of working life or university.

As far as courses for people already in employment are concerned, the district offers as wide a range as possible, taking into account the main economic activities within the area, the resources of neighbouring universities and specific public demand. Its rôle at all levels is to present the consumer with a rich range of resources, as well as a struc-


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ture in which he can become involved and whose activities he can help to orientate.

This is an imperative condition for the implementation of the principle that both children and adults should be free to choose the subjects and courses which they wish to study in order to advance their education and develop themselves. In fact, as we pointed out in chapter IV, in order to provide real freedom of choice very extensive resources must be made available to the consumers of education and it is obviously impossible for all these resources to be available everywhere. All available resources must therefore be pooled and coordinated and this will be done within the educational and cultural district in which, under a single administrative authority, the whole gamut of peripheral resources will be put conjointly at the disposal of the public.

Clearly also our district does not pretend to be self-sufficient. Supplied by regional institutions and connected to neighbouring universities it receives from these precious help in research, training teachers, information, and the scientific testing of methods introduced.

Size of district

This must meet two contradictory requirements. Firstly, it must be large enough to enable the greatest possible variety of choice to be provided. However, the material installations and specialists necessary for each option will only be profitable if the population concerned is large enough. But it must not be too big in order to allow very direct contacts between its administration and its users.

An acceptable hypothesis would be to constitute a district on the basis of a population of 50,000 inhabitants, which would represent roughly 17,000 to 18,000 users in full-time education each year.

Our calculation is based on:
- the development of pre-school education from the age of 2,
- compulsory schooling up to the age of 18,
- the generalization of an educational credit of 1 year every 10 years,
- a massive development of part-time courses which are converted for the purposes of our calculations into full-time units.

Of course such a calculation is always theoretical and the size of districts will vary greatly in function of geographical, demographic and socio-economic realities. In particular, communication difficulties will no doubt require the setting up of incomplete districts, or districts which only provide part of the ideal services, unless facilities for resi-