



★ NETWORKING EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

European Conference
Cities and Urban Spaces: Chances for Cultural and Citizenship Education

29 September - 1 October 2010
Trieste, Italy

Opening Address

by Thomas Krüger

President of Federal Agency for Civic Education (Germany)

Dear guests,

It is a great pleasure for me to see that you have accepted our invitation to attend this year's NECE conference here in Trieste.

For those among you who do not know us yet, let me say some words about NECE: Networking European Citizenship Education stands for an independent and non-formalised initiative promoted by an association of leading European citizenship education organizations. At this point, I would like to warmly welcome some colleagues and co-organisers: Manfred Wirtitsch and Sigrid Steininger from the Austrian Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture, Tatjana Meijvogel-Volk from the Institute for Political Participation in the Netherlands and Alicja Pacewicz from the Centre for Citizenship Education in Poland.

Our network aims primarily to promote the Europeanization of citizenship education. Therefore, it brings together academics and practitioners to stimulate exchange and the dialogue with European multipliers and stakeholders. It creates transparency concerning current discourses and citizenship education topics and promotes trans-national co-operation and project development. To follow up these approaches, we invite participants every year to a major European conference that picks up relevant and current challenges and deals with them from different perspectives.

After venues in, Lisbon, Sofia and Vilnius, this year we decided in favour of Trieste. It is no coincidence that we have invited you to this extraordinary place for this year's NECE conference. Trieste – in former times the most important Mediterranean port of the Danube Monarchy – is a truly European city. Its changeful history – always competing with the trading metropolis Venice, belonging to Austria and later to Italy – and the multi-cultural society in Trieste, make it a city of contrasts, in which people of the most varying cultural and ethnic origins live together. At the same time, the City of Trieste has an exceptional geographical position as a border town between Eastern and Western Europe, at the frontiers with Slovenia and Croatia. The city is considered the gateway to the Balkans, it is at one and the same time a border and a connecting bridge; Trieste accommodates the most northern port in the Adriatic Sea. It was once located directly at the Iron Curtain and today at the external frontier of the EU. In Trieste, the complex problems but also chances for European cities in the 21st century can be identified, since the city is a melting pot of the most diverse cultures and religions, which in the course of globalization, growing mobility and migration are increasingly characterizing the appearance of European towns and cities. The shaping of living together and the promotion of civic commitment as well as the participation and involvement of everyone are great social challenges.



When we discuss the chances for cultural and citizenship education in the context of city and urban space during the next few days, we must bear in mind the changed image of the city and examine this in a broader context: Cities today are very much the focus of public attention, not only as a source of trouble and anxiety, but as places of pride and development. They are sometimes superficially glorified while they remain complex systems that can be approached in many different ways – as markets and urban battlefields where different political and economic interests confront one another. And even though so much has been invested in the embellishment of the cities, most of them still have their less glamorous zones, their urban ghettos, places of exclusion and marginalization. In the daily behaviour of urban dwellers one can see not only enjoyment, pride and a strong identification with the city, but accumulated fears, anxieties and insecurities that permeate the complex systems of urban agglomerations.

The essential feature of European cities is the affirmation of the quality and accessibility of public space. Unlike many cities on other continents, where corporate and private elements are more dominant, European cities have a tradition of public space and public engagement within it. They must, therefore, constantly develop new models of governance that can ensure public participation.

Consequently, from a sociological point of view, cities are frequently seen as “laboratories” for future requirements for the shaping of living together as regards the individual and society. They provide illustrative material for the problems and challenges of the future as well as for models for solving and overcoming them.

This is even more important for our work, as one of the main challenges today is to make migrant populations, including their second and third generations, take part in the decision-making process and identify with this public space as their own. In this sense, culture as well as an activating citizenship education could be approached as an integrating perspective in the analysis of cities and their prospects.

In preparation for this conference, we have already organized a NECE workshop on “Cities and Diversity” in Barcelona together with the Fundación Bertelsmann in June this year. I am very pleased that the head of the Fundación Bertelsmann wishes to continue the discussions also here in Trieste. Welcome Mrs Hertel.

In Barcelona, about 40 experts from all over Europe discussed how citizenship education at the European level can react appropriately to the diverse challenges posed by complex global changes and new expectations towards cities as spaces of living, working and leisure time. In that context, differences but also points in common of eastern and western European urban development processes were found that have to be considered in cultural and citizenship education. At the same time in many cases a great need for discussion was identified, in particular as regards a re-orientation of citizenship education.

Here in Trieste, I would like to warmly invite you to actively contribute your opinions, suggestions and ideas to the discussions on the great variety of aspects of urban development and to identify common interests and tasks of cultural and citizenship education.

Dear guests, we will experience lots of exciting inputs and project presentations in the plenum and the six workshops. We have invited interesting speakers, with whom you can, over the next few days, discuss the complex problem situations, approaches and new forms of participation and sharing in urban space.

I am looking forward to these discussions with great interest and I am eager to see what answers you will give us to the question of “What new perspectives and conclusions can be derived by thinking in categories of urban cultural and citizenship education?”

At this point I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to our regional cooperation partner, the Goethe-Institut Triest. The head of the institute, Mrs Hagemann gave us a lot of support regarding the preparation. For that I would like to say, “Very many thanks!”

And finally I am really looking forward to the lecture by Veit Heinichen, the well-known German author who has already been living in this wonderful city for so long and who tomorrow evening will illustrate for us the diversity and significance of the city of Trieste for world literature. During our guided tour on 1st October you then also have the opportunity to gain these impressions through direct experience.

Thank you very much!