European Conference
**The European Union and the Promise of Democracy:
What can Citizenship Education and Civil Society contribute?**

14-16 November 2013
The Hague, the Netherlands

Input

**Workshop 3
Diversity of concepts of citizenship education in Europe: Is there a need for a common understanding?**

by Avril Keating, Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies
and Societies (LLAKES), Institute of Education, London (UK)

**Convergence but continued divergence:
the evolution of citizenship education policies for schools in Europe**

Over the past two decades there has been an upsurge in the number of European activities that seek to promote cooperation and best practice in citizenship education policies. These activities have been organised not just by the usual suspect (the European Union), but also by the Council of Europe, and non-governmental organisations such as NECE. A key rationale for these activities is that countries are facing common and complex challenges that transcend their borders. Trans-national policy cooperation, it is argued, can help states to pool their problems, share experiences and identify solutions efficiently (Keating, 2013).

In the wake of these activities, there appears to have been a certain amount of convergence in national policies towards citizenship education (CE).[1] Across Europe, similar themes emerge time and time again in CE policy documents. Active citizenship; active learning; community participation; critical thinking; intercultural communication; human rights; and global and European citizenship: these are terms that you will commonly find in CE policy statements, and this pattern lends the appearance of convergence, and least in terms of the policy aims (Osler and Starkey, 2006; Meyer et al, 2010). This convergence thesis is amply illustrated in the evolution of national policies towards education about Europe. Although European institutions have been encouraging member states to include a 'European dimension' to their curricula since the 1950s, up until the early 1990s member states either ignored these efforts or provided merely perfunctory policies for teaching young citizens about Europe at school. Since the early 1990s, however, there has been a marked shift in national education policies. Recent data suggest that all EU member states now include a European dimension to their curricula, and over the course of their formal education even students in non-EU member states will have an opportunity at some point to learn about how the European institutions work, as well as about the economics, politics, history, culture, and identity of Europe (Eurydice, 2012; Kerr et al, 2010).

---

[1] This convergence is not simply or causally attributed to these activities; other, more diffuse factors helped to play a key role.

Continued Divergence

Yet while there is a clear convergence of over-arching policy *aims*, there is still remarkable divergence across Europe in the content and scope of the policies that are actually implemented in classrooms. For example, if we take education about Europe as an example again, the recent International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) found that students in Sweden and Switzerland were, on average, least likely to report that they had received opportunities to learn about Europe at school, while students in Bulgaria, Italy and Malta were most likely to do so (Kerr et al, 2010: 133-134). The breadth and depth of these cross-national differences is even more apparent when one takes a closer look at the different topics that member states consider to be a 'European' dimension to their curriculum. In Poland, for example, it is striking that one of the European dimension topics in the lower secondary civic education is the 'spiritual dimension of the European Community' and specifically, the teachings of the John Paul II, a Polish priest who served as Pope from 1978 - 2005. In Italy, by contrast, the exceptional aspect is the prominence given to art in citizenship and European education, while in Slovakia the European dimension is linked to consumer education.[2]

In *Education for citizenship in Europe* (in press), I argue that these variations are not mere national 'quirks' or incidental associations; rather, these differences are indicative of the fact that the fundamental political logic of citizenship education has not changed. Member states have accommodated the idea of educating young people about European citizenship as well as national citizenship, but in the process they re-frame European citizenship so that it reflects and legitimises *national* citizenship projects, rather than a wider European one. In other words, CE policies in member states still seek to create and consolidate *national* citizenship, despite their claims of seeking to prepare young people for European citizenship and their inclusion of information about Europe and European integration in their national curricula.

Multiple citizenship educations, diverse implications

One reason for these cross-national differences is that the underlying structures of national systems continue to differ considerably; this means, for example, that some students receive formal citizenship education during primary school, while others do not do so until their mid-late teens. But a more important factor, I believe, is that education policy is governed by subsidiarity and thus curriculum policies for teaching young people about Europe are decided in member states rather than at the European level. This gives national governments (and/ or sub-national governments) the freedom to choose how and when to provide education about Europe and, as a result, leaves considerable scope for cross-national variation. Even when common policy aims are agreed by member states (as they were in the EU's core competences framework in 2006), the extent of these structural differences and subsidiarity arrangements means that these statements are merely indicative of a convergence of broad policy *aims* rather than a common understanding of (or programme for) citizenship education in schools. If we look beyond these broad similarities, it could be argued that in fact the current approach to European educational governance and citizenship-making encourages the emergence of multiple versions of European citizenship, each reflecting the different ways in which member states seek to portray 'Europe' in their school curricula, and the different ways they wish to use European integration to further the nation-state.

In light of this, I believe it would be extremely difficult to develop a common understanding of citizenship education, even if one were desirable. However, in this brief background paper I

---

[2] This data was drawn from the *Eurypedia*; and in particular the individual country reports on the international dimension to early childhood and school education. These reports are compiled in member states by national representatives; as such, these data should be treated with the same caution that all self-reported data is.

do not wish to advocate for one position over another, or to suggest that a common understanding should be implemented across all European states. Instead, I want to adopt a provocative position and to use this opportunity to highlight that the 'solution' is not clear cut, as there are a number of reasons why the current diversity of approaches has its advantages as well as its disadvantages, at least for the development of European citizenship.

Some reasons why policy diversity is not anathema to the development of European citizenship…

First, the underling ideologies, practices, and aims of citizenship are inherently flexible are constantly changing. As a result, trying to pin down a common or fixed understanding of citizenship or citizenship education is a redundant task. Second, and relatedly, I believe that the flexibility of this concept is one of the factors that has helped the European citizenship project to survive, as it has allowed European citizenship to adapt to, rather than compete with, national citizenship for the attentions and affections of Europe's citizens. This malleability may also have made this concept more acceptable to citizens, who do not have to give up their existing citizenship-links in order to be European. Third, even with the current level of diversity in educational provision, education about Europe still 'works' (at least to some degree); students who receive more opportunities for learning about Europe at school are more likely to report European identity and more likely to support one of the key principles of European integration (namely support for freedom of movement within Europe) (see Keating, in press: Chapter 7).

Some reasons why policy diversity is problematic…

Yet there are also a number of reasons why the diversity of approaches is problematic. For one, education about Europe does not appear to increase young people's knowledge about Europe or their intentions to vote in European Parliament elections. Methodological or life-stage issues may contribute to explaining these results, but it is still a matter of concern if we are to create and sustain democratic institutions at the European level. Both knowledge and intentions to vote are associated with electoral participation and healthy democracies (ibid).

Second, allowing member states to (re)define what European citizenship means for national purposes creates the risk that European citizenship becomes so enmeshed in national citizenship that it ceases to have any independent meaning; European citizenship will only exist when it is being re-imagined in, and for, national frames of reference. From a theoretical perspective, this affirms the argument that European citizenship is 'thin', and that it will never develop sufficient substance or meaning to generate a sense of pan-European solidarity or attachment among Europe's citizens (Delanty, 2007). But more importantly, it leaves citizens without a clear idea of what European citizenship stands for, and little sense of what is supposed to bind the citizens of Europe to each other or to the supra-national institutions. Finally, because European citizenship has no clear or shared understanding, it makes it even harder for citizens to hold the European institutions and policymakers to account. As the future of the European citizenship project is currently in flux, it is for this reason most of all that diversity is a dilemma that deserves to be debated.

References

Delanty, G. (2007). European citizenship: A critical assessment. *Citizenship studies*, *11*(1), 63-72.

European Parliament and Council of the European Union (2006) *Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning* (2006/962/EC) [online] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:394:0010:0018:en:PDF

Eurydice (2012) Citizenship Education in Europe. Brussels. Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

Keating, A, Hinderliter Ortloff, D. and Philippou, S. (2009) 'Citizenship education curricula: the changes and challenges presented by global and European integration.' In: *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, Volume 41, Number 2, April 2009, pp. 145-158

Keating, A. (2013) New modes of governance in Europe: mapping the multiple actors, institutions, and instruments in a shifting political space. In: *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 34 (3), 475-485

Keating, A. (in press) *Education for citizenship in Europe: European policies, national adaptations, and young people's attitudes*. Palgrave Macmillan (expected March 2014)

Kerr, D. Sturman, L., Schulz, W. And Burge, B., (2010). European Report from the IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study. Amsterdam: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement.

Meyer, J. W., Bromley, P., & Ramirez, F. O. (2010). Human Rights in Social Science Textbooks Cross-national Analyses, 1970–2008. *Sociology of Education*, *83*(2), 111-134.

Osler, A. & Starkey, H. (2006) 'Education for Democratic Citizenship: a review of research, policy and practice 1995-2005' in *Research Papers in Education,* 21:4, 433 – 466