

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

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Input

Workshop 5

**Citizenship education on the political agenda of the EU: How much is it valued
and what does this mean for the role of citizenship education in the EU?**

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“Citizenship” is both a fundamental value and a significant objective of the European Union, but at the same time it is treated like an orphan or a luxury we cannot afford. So is citizenship education.

In my input I am going to reconstruct three different contexts of justification of citizenship education in the policy of the European Union.

First context of justification: Citizenship is a fundamental value and objective of the European Union; citizenship education for coherence.

“Active” or “European” citizenship is firstly mentioned 1997 in the treaty of Amsterdam. In article 7 it is said: “Citizenship of the Union is hereby established. Every person holding the nationality of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union.” Here “citizens” is meant in terms of a “homo politicus” or “nationals” (though European citizenship of course does not replace national citizenship). After all the inhabitants of the European Union should gain more rights and more security through European citizenship. Article B says: “The Union shall set itself the following objectives: (...) to strengthen the protection of the rights and interests of the nationals of its Member States through the introduction of a citizenship of the Union.” This concept of citizenship can be understood as a concept of citizens, being European “nationals” in a democratic political system.

By establishing the eight key competencies of the European Union in 2006, “civic competence” was defined as the “particularly knowledge of social and political concepts and structures (democracy, justice, equality, citizenship and civil rights), which equips individuals to engage in active and democratic participation”

(http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/lifelong_learning/c11090_en.htm). Thus being outlined, the support of civic competence could be a genuine objective of citizenship education. Nevertheless, there is not, and never has been, a genuine action programme of the European Union for citizenship education. There are at least two reasons for that.

One reason is that this idea of European citizenship is also attended by the desire and by protestations, that the European Union needs to be understood not only as a politically organized system, but also as a living space and a cultural sphere. European citizens should have a European identity, they should relate to Europe and the Union, they should be emotional committed. In this context, very often Jacques Delors is quoted with his alleged sentence “You cannot fall in love with an internal market.” Hundreds of Eurobarometer-

surveys give evidence of this desire; nearly every questionnaire of social surveys, especially for young people, contains the question: “Do you feel as a European?”

“The project EU-Europe”, says Heidemarie Uhl, an Austrian historian, “needs, in the opinion of (this) relevant entities, an emotional foundation, a collective feeling of togetherness and belonging”¹. She detects a “pathos” for which the usual tools for national identity formation are implemented: concepts of a common history and a common culture, symbols and rituals such as a flag or a hymn or the design of the Euro-banknotes, exhibitions, publications and EU-gimmicks.

Nevertheless, the main image we are used to from TV is the family-photo along with each summit meeting – Europe’s heads of state and government, not its citizens. By these incapable means the EU failed in large parts in strengthening a “European identity” and a political awareness, perhaps for all but well-educated and mobile young people.

As a consequence, some efforts are made in order to strengthen European identity not only by means of official EU-narratives and imagery, but also by means of the action programme “Europe for Citizens“, which supports three objectives:

- To encourage citizens to become actively involved in the process of European integration
- To enable citizens to develop a sense of European identity
- To enhance mutual understanding between European citizens

From the perspective of civic education (or education for democratic citizenship), these efforts often lack a critical impetus. The feeling of common identity does not mean that there is real solidarity and coherence. A “real citizen of the European Union” needs not to agree with its construction. And, moreover, the construction of identity (and what’s more: as a cultural hierarchy) on the one hand brings exclusion of others on the other hand.

Second context of justification: The basis of citizenship is employability

The second reason why there is no special programme for citizenship education is the understanding of citizenship as a general objective of all education.

Even before the Amsterdam treaty, the White Paper on Education and Training - “Teaching and learning: Towards the learning society” (1995)

(http://ec.europa.eu/languages/documents/doc409_en.pdf) - had stressed that “the future of European culture depends on its capacity to equip young people to question constantly and seek new answers without prejudicing human values. This is the very foundation of citizenship and is essential if European society is to be open, multicultural and democratic.” (p 10)

By this and up from this point, citizenship was said to be an overall aim of education: “Education lays the foundations of awareness and of European citizenship” (ibid.).

In the following years, education becomes a central term within the frameworks of the Lisbon Strategy (EU-Strategy 2010) and the Strategy Europe 2020, as a precondition, in fact as a sine qua non, of economic growth. And along with this development, also citizenship made its career and ended up on top of the agenda as a key element of the strategic direction of European policies.

¹ Heidemarie Uhl: EU-Europa als visuelles Narrativ. In: Kulturrisse 2/2004, S. 38-39, Online: <http://kulturrisse.at/ausgaben/022004>

The price, however, was high: “Citizenship”, being quite a vague concept anyway and now and then indecently attributed by “European” or “active”, was interpreted as a main feature of an active, qualified ‘homo oeconomicus’, the key actor of the realization of the economic strategies of the EU. All of the six reports for the “Education and Training 2010 work programme” mention “active citizenship” as a central objective of lifelong learning. Since 2007 (COM-Communication “Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training, indicators and benchmarks”, http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/report09/report_en.pdf) there are efforts to define and measure “active citizenship” and “civic skills”.

Since then there has been a tendency to claim citizenship no longer as a second objective along with employability, but to merge both to the one aim of European (educational) policy. The Commission’s Memorandum on lifelong learning in 2000 (<http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/MemorandumEng.pdf>) says: „Active citizenship focuses on whether and how people participate in all spheres of social and economic life, the chances and risks they face in trying to do so, and the extent to which they therefore feel that they belong to and have a fair say in the society in which they live.” (p 5). And the Communication from the commission “Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality” (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2001:0678:FIN:EN:PDF>) defines “active citizenship” as “the cultural, economic, political/democratic and/or social participation of citizens in society as a whole and in their community” (p 31).

We can assume that if it had continued the way, which was loomed already, citizenship, and citizenship education, would have stayed to be the hybrid catchword between political participation and employability. If... if there hadn’t been ‘the crisis’.

In the middle of the planning and the negotiations for the new generation of the EU-action programmes, the financial markets in Europe crashed. From that moment on there was only one thought in all member states: charity begins at home. Half because they were convinced anyway, half of them because of the massive pressure of some member states. Since then the commission had only one, or let’s say two concerns: economic growth and employment.

Therefore, there were two decisions, which were principally easy to reach between the member states. The first one was the decision to bank on education (education, education, education as a motor for development and growth). Therefore, it was rather easy to get an agreement to raise the budget of a future education programme. The second agreement was to focus on the support of employability within this programme.

I quote from the website of the general directory for education and culture (http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus-for-all/index_en.htm) concerning the rationale for the new program ERASMUS for all, now “ERASMUS+”, the new program, replacing the current program for Lifelong Learning and Youth in Action:

“The world was different when the existing programmes were created. We are currently experiencing one of the most tumultuous economic periods of our time. The EU has responded with a co-ordinated strategy for growth and jobs called Europe 2020 – and education and training are an integral part of this. (...)To contribute to this goal, Erasmus+ will support modernisation at all levels of education and training, including school education, from early childhood to secondary level and initial vocational training.”

In November 2012, the commission published a communication with the suggestively title “rethinking education - Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes” (http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/com669_en.pdf).

In this communication the commission makes quite clear which are the priorities in a crisis. It says:

“The broad mission of education and training encompasses objectives such as active citizenship, personal development and well-being. While these go hand-in-hand with the need to upgrade skills for employability, against the backdrop of sluggish economic growth and a shrinking workforce due to demographic ageing, the most pressing challenges for Member States are to address the needs of the economy and focus on solutions to tackle fast-rising youth unemployment. In this communication, emphasis is being placed on delivering the right skills for employment, increasing the efficiency and inclusiveness of our education and training institutions and on working collaboratively with all relevant stakeholders.” (p 2). Let’s say it in a nutshell: Citizenship is a luxury; employability is the staff of life.

As a consequence, “citizenship” is mentioned only once in the communication of the Commission concerning the new programme ERASMUS for all (now ERASMUS+) and that is in the context of Youth mobility, the third context of justification, which I will go into detail now.

Before I do that, just one remark:

GRUNDTVIG, currently part of the programme for Lifelong Learning and known as a programme for non-formal adult education with a clear mission in regard to citizenship education, is definitely going to be restricted within the frame of ERASMUS+. (There will be no more European workshops, for instance.) Since all future sub-programmes, also GRUNDTVIG, will have to answer the aims of the ERASMUS+-programme, it cannot be ruled out that there will be a strong tendency to support employability respectively only professionals and professionalization in adult education rather than citizenship education. Up to now, at least the proposal of the European parliament provides for the aim “support of participation in democratic life in Europe” with regard to the so-called “strategic partnerships” (an action within the programme).

Third context of justification: Citizenship is part of the construction, the understanding and the hopes concerning youth

One of the main objectives of the youth programmes of the EU is (active or European) “citizenship”. Youth policy has been developed since 2001, starting with the White Paper on Youth “A new impetus for European youth”

(<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52001DC0681:EN:NOT>).

There were two reasons for the White paper: First of all, there was a growing awareness for “Youth” as a single, distinct group with special living conditions, challenges and needs. Secondly, the White Paper on Youth was also intended as a response to young people’s strong disaffection with the traditional forms of participation in public life – in the White Paper it is called a “citizenship deficit”. Following the example of the White Paper on governance, it calls on young Europeans to become active citizens and to make a greater contribution to society. The White Paper on Youth therefore was adopted following widespread consultations with all relevant stakeholders at both national and European level, including young people themselves.

It is no surprise, that one of the four key messages that have emerged from the consultation process is active citizenship (by the way, along with “expanding and recognizing areas of experimentation”, “developing autonomy among young people” and “for a European Union as the champion of values”). Participation must be encouraged, the White Paper demands, without exception, which means making it easier for those who have the greatest difficulties and providing greater access to existing structures for young people who are not members of organizations.

I quote:

“We need to put in place the right conditions to enable young people in Europe to see themselves and behave more as supportive, responsible, active and tolerant citizens in plural societies. Getting young people more involved into the life of the local, national and European communities, and fostering active citizenship thus represent one of the major challenges, not only for the present but also for the future of our societies.” (p 11)

As a consequence, “citizenship training for all”, as being demanded in the White Paper, has been, and is still, one of the main concerns of all youth programmes up to now.

Also in the strategic papers and reports this objective plays an important role. In the first youth report (http://ec.europa.eu/youth/documents/youth_report_final.pdf) – a report on the living conditions of young people in Europe every member state has to deliver every three years – it is said: „Active citizenship of young people, (...), is a key component of the future of European Union. It is also a political priority at the European level.” (p 44) And there is a definition:

„The term citizenship is used to express three different concepts which can be used simultaneously:

- what a citizen is, i.e. his or her status;
- what a citizen can or cannot do, i.e. in terms of rights and duties; and
- which activities a citizen undertakes, i.e. a set of practices that demonstrate his/ her membership of a society.” (p 44).

This point of view has been spelled out in every youth programme and it has been renewed in every programmatic and strategic paper on European youth policy, recently in the “EU-Youth-Strategy 2010-2018”

(<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0200:FIN:EN:PDF>), the framework of all cooperation in the field of youth policy. Moreover, within the frame of the partnership between the European Union and the Council of Europe, “CRELL”, the “Centre for Research on Education and Lifelong Learning” was founded. Since 2005, the center has been working on a research project named „Active Citizenship for Democracy“. It has, among other research questions, worked on a definition and on indicators for active citizenship.

CRELL defines active citizenship as: „Participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterized by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy.”²

Well, we really could be happy with this as far as European youth policy and EU-youth subsidies policy is concerned. Every evaluation of the last years confirmed that the cooperation in the youth field and the grants of the youth programme are contributing to more participation of young people in democratic life and to more active, democratic citizenship, it even fosters an increase of “European identity” of young people. So, at the end of 2011, everybody expected a sequel of the successful youth programme.

But then there was the crisis.... Due to the justification I mentioned already, the commission proposed a huge educational programme (“ERASMUS for ALL” resp. “ERASMUS+”) with the objectives and some formats of the current youth programme subordinated to the actions educational programme. Again, it is employability as the main aim, which nearly seems to substitute the present aim “citizenship”.

Only because of a “shit storm” never seen before in European subsidies policy, a protest of young people’ organizations and civil society lined up with national governments and the

² Hoskins, Bryony (2006): Draft Framework for Indicators on Active Citizenship, Ispra, Online: http://crell.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ActiveCitizenship/Conference/01_Hoskins%20framework_final.pdf

European parliament against the commission's plans, it seems that the plans have changed. There will be a special "chapter" or sub-programme "Youth in Action" even after 2013. However, nobody knows up to now, how much also this sub-programme should contribute to the objectives of the new super-programme. As far as we know up to now, at least there will be no more funding for youth initiatives and no more youth democratic projects.

The lesson is clear: As long as the European Union does not succeed in being more than an economic area, as long as there is no awareness for being a political space and a democratic system, the understanding of citizens (in terms of sovereign) and the awareness of a special citizenship education is insufficient, as well as the subsidies policy in this field.

Discussion

There were some major points in the following discussion:

- First of all everyone agreed that the impact of the financial crisis on the policy of the EU in general and especially concerning citizenship education has to be questioned. The participants were afraid that the emphasis on employment and economic growth as a measure of all things could have enormous effects especially on the implementation of the education programmes. They were concerned about a possibly non-sustainable approach, just reacting to the crisis without acting proactive for more democracy in Europe.
- Some of the participants assume that one of the determining factors of the crisis, or at least of the reaction on the crisis, is the lack of a sustainable value system and of a political awareness of people in the European Union. One might even say that the lack of solidarity and providence is a consequence of failing citizenship education resp. citizenship education programmes. Even politicians, though, do not share a European "spirit" of cohesion and the feeling of togetherness.
- Everybody in the workshop agreed that the response of the EU in terms of measures and grants is merely a curative instead of preventive one. Or, in the words of the moderator, the EU is just trying to put out the fire without addressing the source of ignition.
- There should be, of course, more means and resources in order to foster citizenship education for a more democratic and critical thinking.