

Education for democratic citizenship in Europe :
Concepts and challenges for action

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INTRODUCTION

The NECE conference is part and parcel of a movement for citizenship education which currently exists in Europe. One indicator of this movement is that governments are putting citizenship education high on the international agenda. Another indicator is that several studies have recently been published in this field. One can undoubtedly notice an intensification of initiatives in the last ten years or so :

- The Council of Europe Heads of State and Government made education for democratic citizenship one of the main priorities of its educational programme in 1997;
- the European Union carried out a study in 1998 and included active citizenship in its key texts on lifelong learning and its current work programme on the future of education and training until 2010;
- Ministers of education discussed citizenship education, even if in a very informal setting, in the OECD context in March this year;
- The Ministers of education discussed citizenship education again at the first Education Council meeting of the current Dutch Presidency in Rotterdam at the beginning of July
- The United Nations are preparing a new World Programme on human rights education starting in 2005 as a follow-up of the Decade 1995-2004
- The Council of Europe has declared 2005 the European Year of Citizenship through Education

As a starting point for the conference workshops, this paper intends to provide an overview by covering two main aspects :

- concepts, motivation and issues of EDC, so as to provide common reference points for discussions
- challenges for action, so as to provide some suggestions for future developments

The paper is organised around four theses :

- Citizenship education in Europe is characterised by both common concerns and diversity, conceptually and in practice
- A shared approach to citizenship education is emerging in Europe : EDC
- EDC and European citizenship are very close but nevertheless different
- Diverse action is necessary to make national and European political objectives and discourse a reality

1. Citizenship education in Europe is characterised by common concerns but diversity in concepts and practices

1.1 Why citizenship education ?

The main aspect that is shared across Europe is the motivation for citizenship education.

On the one hand, it is widely accepted that living in a democracy is neither inborn nor to be taken for granted. Like any culture, the democratic culture, made of shared values and common rules of society, needs to be transmitted and learnt. So citizenship learning is inherent to our democratic systems.

But the current movement for citizenship learning stems from deeply felt concerns.

The Council of Europe explained the need for adopting its EDC recommendation (2002) 12 in the following way

...the growing levels of political and civic apathy and lack of confidence in democratic institutions, and ... the increased cases of corruption, racism, xenophobia, aggressive nationalism, intolerance of minorities, discrimination and social exclusion, all of which are major threats to the security, stability and growth of democratic societies;

... to protect the rights of citizens, to make them aware of their responsibilities and strengthen democratic society;

... the responsibilities of present and future generations to maintain and safeguard democratic societies, and of the role of education in promoting the active participation of all individuals in political, civic, social and cultural life;

Last July, the EU Ministers of Education summarised their motivation for citizenship education in the following terms¹ :

Recent changes affecting the social and cultural condition of our societies such as globalization, immigration, communication technology and individualization, present new challenges to the existing mechanisms by which norms and values that are the basis for social cohesion, are transferred to next generations of citizens.

As European societies need the participation of active citizens, many Member States are making efforts to enhance social cohesion by promoting active citizenship in democracies in schools as well in the field of lifelong learning.

The concerns are related to the essential fabric of our democratic societies : their values, forms of social interaction and organisation and the perceived threats to them; to the consequences and the management of changes in societies.

Not only is it necessary to learn to live together in a democratic society, not only is democracy a permanently unfinished and perfectible project. Today the trends described

¹ Presidency conclusions on Citizenship education as part of the 'Lisbon agenda', Informal meeting of Ministers of Education and Culture, Rotterdam, 12-14 July 2004

above are perceived as challenges, even as threats to the foundations of our social and political systems. Democracy is thought to be “experiencing a crisis of legitimacy.”²

1.2 A diversity in concepts and practices

Active citizenship, civic education, political education, citizenship education, citizenship learning, education for democratic citizenship, social education, human rights education, democracy learning, learning to live together.... Etc

There is a great variety in concepts and terminology across Europe. Important differences also exist concerning

- the organisation of citizenship learning in the formal curriculum, in terms of time allocation, whether it is subject based or cross-curricular, obligatory or optional
- educational policies, whether citizenship learning is a distinct part of public policies (eg Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, UK), or one component of educational policies (eg. Austria, Belgium, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia, Turkey, Ukraine)³

These differences are undoubtedly related to different historical, educational and political traditions. Citizenship refers to the way a community defines itself, who is in, who is not, what is the common identity, what are the ground rules. Each community answered these questions in its own way over time, through its own political struggles.

In other words, by nature citizenship is contested, i.e. is open for different interpretations. It is also contextual. Recent research even goes further to suggest that active citizenship is “rooted and embedded in each individual’s unique life history and formed through relationships with others”⁴. Citizenship learning is tailor-made for each context nationally, locally, for the different educational areas, in response to specific social problems.

Beyond the semantic differences, what is important is spelling out the core features and constitutive elements of citizenship learning.

2. A shared approach to citizenship education is emerging in Europe : EDC

While there is not one unique recipe, a shared framework is slowly emerging at European level. As stated in the synthesis of the Council of Europe all-European study on EDC policies,

*in the late '90s, although approaches varied, most European countries adopted education for democratic citizenship as the common reference point for all learning democracy processes.*⁵

The increasingly converging understanding of EDC is that it is multifaceted and comprehensive. It includes and integrates the several key aspects. This comprehensive approach also strives to ensure coherence between the components. The principles of

² Learning for democratic citizenship, Ove Korsgaard, Shirley Walters and Randi Andersen (eds), Association for World Education and Danish University of Education, 2001, p.18

³ All-European study on policies of education for democratic citizenship, Council of Europe, 2003

⁴ Lifelong learning, governance and active citizenship in Europe, final report of the ETGACE research project, University of Surrey, Guildford, UK

⁵ All-European study on EDC policies, op.cit., p. 9

citizenship education apply throughout educational policies and practices. EDC is not only about didactics. It has systemic implications as well.

i) concept of citizenship

The notion of citizenship has broadened from only political and legal dimensions to the concept of learning to live together, seeing the citizen as a co-citizen.

“Citizenship is a complex and multidimensional concept. It consists of legal, cultural, social and political elements and provides citizens with defined rights and obligations, a sense of identity, and social bonds.” (Ichilov, 1998)

“Citizenship is the active membership and participation of individuals in society who are entitled to rights and responsibilities and who have the capacity to influence politics. Therefore citizenship has to be more than a political and juridical status; it also is a social role.” (Cesar Birzea, 2002)⁶

ii) aim of educational policies

As stated in the synthesis of the all-European study on EDC policies
in all public education systems across Europe, democracy learning is an explicit aim... Education for democracy and EDC policies are seen as an unfailing means of consolidating democracy...⁷

iii) learning objectives

For the Council of Europe, education for democratic citizenship

- equips men and women to play an active part in public life and to shape in a responsible way their own destiny and that of their society;
- aims to instil a culture of human rights which will ensure full respect for those rights and understanding of responsibilities that flow from them;
- prepares people to live in a multicultural society and to deal with difference knowledgeably, sensibly, tolerantly and morally.

EDC is a form of *literacy* : it aims at coming to grips with what happens in public life; being “lucid” (France), enlightened (Aufklaerung), developing knowledge, understanding, critical thinking and independent judgement of local, national, European, global levels

It is *based on values* : human rights, pluralist democracy, the rule of law, respect for diversity, solidarity, responsibility

It implies *action* : through empowerment, i.e. acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes, it aims at being able and willing to use these and make decisions, take action individually and collectively

iv) learning approaches

Learning for citizenship corresponds to a “didactic triangle including three interdependent and mutually supportive categories”⁸ : cognitive (knowledge), pragmatic (action), and affective (values) learning.

⁶ Citizenship, Youth and Europe, Tool kit 7, Council of Europe and European Commission partnership

⁷ *ibid*, pp. 15 - 16

⁸ Learning for democratic citizenship, *op. cit.*, p. 12

The forms and settings of citizenship learning are multiple and diverse. Citizenship learning happens in formal, non-formal and informal settings, through a number of common characteristics. Citizenship learning is :

- social learning (learning in society, about society, for society)
- based on experience and practice, through learning by doing, through exploration, action and cooperation
- implies the democratisation of learning by focusing on the learner, valuing his/her situation and experience, fostering his/her autonomy and responsibility in the learning process
- is achieved through multiple, interconnected, transversal learning approaches, for example through civic education, human rights education, intercultural education, education for peace, global education and media education

v) *the learning environment and educational governance*

EDC cannot happen effectively in a non-democratic, authoritarian environment. In order to develop a democratic culture, to learn democracy by living it, it is essential to ensure coherence between teaching and learning, the learning environment and educational management.

This has implications, particularly for formal education concerning

- making democratic school values explicit and acting accordingly (codes of conduct, measures and procedures, eg on school discipline, the prevention of violence and conflict resolution)
- adopting a non authoritarian leadership style and developing collaborative management approaches;
- respecting pupils rights and creating opportunities for their self-expression and participation in decision-making
- opening up the school to parents participation, NGOs and the wider community

3. EDC and European citizenship are very close but nevertheless different

The starting point of this conference is stated as the following :

Europe is growing – geographically, politically, economically and culturally. Consequently, the concepts and the agendas together with the actors in civic education can no longer be considered valid only in a national context.

The conference description and programme also talks about a European public, a mature European civil society and European citizenship education.

EDC and European citizenship are two different areas of reflection and practices which need to be distinguished. They are so often mixed up, taken one for the other, probably because they are at the same time very close and inter-related.

3.1 Why European citizenship ?

The urgency of European citizenship is driven mainly by the developments of the European Union : its enlargement; the preparation, the forthcoming discussions and adoption processes of the European Constitution; and the results of the European elections of last June.

To summarise and simplify, there seems to be a gap between Europe and its citizens.

i) *concerning the recent European elections*, which were the widest transnational elections ever

- the participation rate was 45,7 %, that is less than one voter out of two went to vote
- participation rates ranged from 90,81% in Belgium, where voting is obligatory, to 16,96 % in Slovakia. Malta (82,37 %) and Italy (73,1 %) were the next best non mandatory countries. Poland was second before last (20.87 %)
- 67% of voters aged between 18 and 24 did not vote, this is higher than the 54,3 % average abstention rate
- the trend is going downwards : in 1979, the rate of participation was 63%, in 1999, 49,8%

ii) *concerning the European Constitution*

A Eurobarometer survey on the future European Constitution published in July 2004 concluded that

- “citizens of the European Union consider that they are poorly informed about the European Constitution”
- while there is a majority of citizens who are in favour of the Constitution, there are important differences in this acceptance and relatively high number of undecided people in several countries, where positive opinions are also lower

iii) *concerning European citizenship*

Different Eurobarometer polls, synthesised in the brochure⁹ “How Europeans see themselves”, indicate that European citizenship, in terms the knowledge of citizens’ rights conferred by the European Union, of feelings of attachment to Europe, the existence of a European cultural identity shared by all Europeans, the link between national and European citizenship, is unevenly spread across Europe and brings about very differing opinions from country to country.

3.2. European citizenship and its link to democratic citizenship

European and democratic citizenship have both several points in common and a number of distinctive characteristics.

Both European citizenship and democratic citizenship are anchored in the same fundamental values : respect of human rights, the rule of law, pluralism, equality and diversity.

They both include legal and affective dimensions of citizenship : rights and responsibilities, identity and the sense of belonging, empowerment and participation.

⁹ European Commission, 2001

On the other hand, European citizenship is a clearly defined set of European rights. European citizenship was first defined as such in the Maastricht treaty of 1992 (article 17) and reaffirmed in the European Constitution of last June. Citizenship of the Union complements national citizenship and entitles citizens to the following rights :

- the right to move and reside freely
- the right to vote and to stand as candidate in European and local elections
- the right to diplomatic and consular protection
- the right to petition the European parliament
- the right to refer matters to the Ombudsman
- the right to write to the institutions in one of the Union's European languages
- the right of access to documents of the Union

The Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Union's own catalogue of rights, is incorporated into the European Constitution. This means that the institutions of the Union must abide by these rights. So do Member States when implementing Union legislation.

In addition to freedom of establishment, freedom of movement for people, goods, services and capital are guaranteed by the Union.

With the Constitution come new obligations of the Union to consult civil society and to be transparent.

At the same time European citizenship faces an important challenge of relevance, given the complexity of European integration and institutions and the lack of evident connection to people's daily lives.

A case in point for the difference in relevance between democratic and European citizenship is the reality of civil society. European civil society is undoubtedly emerging particularly through exchanges, cooperation and networks. One can feel European civil society very strongly in Brussels. But it is hardly relevant e.g. in Welwyn Garden City where, on the other hand, the local photo club is one of my means of integration in my new community. This conference aims appropriately to develop strategies for strengthening the NGO's contribution and European cooperation in the area of citizenship learning, including through the 2005 EDC Year.

Because of the European integration process and on the basis of the European Constitution, European citizenship has become an essential dimension of democratic citizenship and should be a key component of EDC programmes.

Fostering European citizenship requires specific measures within and in addition to overall policies and measures for democratic citizenship, focusing on :

- acquiring specific knowledge about European institutions; rights and responsibilities; the different countries, their history, geography, literature;
- language learning;
- multiplying and facilitating mobility and exchanges and ensuring equal opportunities in mobility;
- developing intercultural openness and skills.

4. Diverse action is necessary to make national and European political objectives and discourse a reality

In spite of the declarations and explicit policies at national and European level, EDC is not yet an effective reality across Europe. Five main challenges call for a diversity of measures and areas to improve EDC in schools and within the broader lifelong learning context.

4.1 EDC concepts and understanding

The concepts of EDC are per se a challenge. Its understanding needs to be explained and shared widely and the following potential difficulties overcome.

The notion of citizenship and EDC are complex and, from the practitioners' point of view not immediately operational. There is a strong request for a simpler, clearer and more accessible approach. On the other hand, simplification includes the risk of watering down the understanding of democracy, society and related learning processes.

While we are here to discuss the local, national and European dimensions of EDC, the global dimension must not be forgotten. Awareness and understanding of global interdependence and globalisation processes, the promotion of global solidarity and participation are essential components of today's society.

Another challenge will come from the foreseen adoption at UN level of a new World Programme on human rights education which will focus in its first phase (2005-2007) on primary and secondary education. The Europe region will need to consider how EDC and human rights education are related, how do the policies and practices of one contribute to the other.

The global dimension of citizenship education, i.e. raising awareness on interdependence and solidarity and connecting with UNESCO's Decade for education for sustainable development (2005 – 2014).

Finally, while a multitude of initiatives and practices currently contribute to EDC, the comprehensive and integrated approach of EDC, combining concepts, teaching and learning and educational governance needs to be adopted and disseminated.

4.2 the status of EDC in school education

The all-European study on EDC policies has highlighted the weak position of EDC within the formal curriculum. In general, little time is allocated to it (between one and two hours a week). In case of cross curricular approaches, no specific time is allocated to it.

The advantages and disadvantages of a subject-based or a cross curricular approach are regularly debated. On the one hand including the learning of EDC principles throughout the curriculum is in line with seeing EDC as an overall educational aim. On the other hand, a subject-based approach is likely to provide for better visibility and for pooling necessary resources and support.

Two additional aspects contribute to this weak position :

- the understanding of basic skills where literacy and numeracy are still predominant. They are the foundation of citizenship skills. However, social skills should be given more value, eg through the more encompassing notion of lifeskills
- priority is given to those curriculum subjects which are tested and lead to formal certificates, final school or university entrance examinations. The issue of evaluating and assessing EDC is difficult because it includes acquiring values, attitudes and skills which are not necessarily measurable and quantifiable.

4.3. effective EDC in schools : the compliance gap

The Council of Europe work on EDC policies has highlighted the so-called compliance-gap, ie the mis-match between a very strong and well-developed policy discourse, in terms of intentions and value options, and important weaknesses of EDC practices.

Three aspects need to be focused on in particular :

- *implementation measures* : while policy guidelines are well developed, implementation plans, prescribing the necessary course of action for EDC development are missing. Either they do not exist at all for EDC, or EDC is not visible or explicit enough within overall educational reforms or implementation measures. This in turn has consequences in terms of status, responsibility and available resources.
- *training of teachers, headmasters and other educational staff* : underlying EDC are major changes in teaching methods and the role of teachers and other educational staff and in school organisation. Nevertheless training policies and practices do not respond to the required needs. Among the current weaknesses are particularly the limited inclusion of EDC within pre-service teacher training; a multitude and often un-coordinated offers by a variety of stakeholders of in-service teacher training. Training headteachers, school inspectors, national and local educational officials in EDC also needs to be strengthened and appropriate materials prepared.
- *quality assurance* : quality assurance, which includes school self-evaluation and school development planning, introducing accountability for achievements and ensuring support to schools for their improvement, is seen more and more as a means to ensure effectiveness in education. As part of the development of quality assurance policies and practices in formal education, fostering quality assurance for EDC requires the preparation of specific indicators and evaluation tools as well as training in their use.

4.4. lifelong learning for democratic citizenship

Many texts and declarations, eg of the Council of Europe and the European Commission, underline the close connection between EDC and lifelong learning. Statements also emphasise that the objective of lifelong learning is not only employability but also active citizenship and social inclusion. In other words, not only professional skills and qualifications are important, but also social skills, democratic attitudes and participation in society.

The Eurobarometer on lifelong learning highlighted that citizens primary motivation for learning is the acquisition of social skills.

Nevertheless, in a difficult socio-economic context which leads to focusing on LLL for employability, lifelong learning for democratic citizenship needs to go beyond initial intentions and discourse

- most countries need to be make *explicit policy statements* on lifelong learning for democratic citizenship
- similarly to lifelong learning in general, policies and implementation of lifelong learning for democratic citizenship specifically, in youth work, adult education , VET, need to be better *coordinated*
- non-formal citizenship learning for young people and adults requires continuous public support, through training opportunities and funding, and on the basis of acknowledging its complementarity with formal education and its capacity to provide a resource for flexible democracy learning and educational innovation

4.5. research and advocacy

The current situation of EDC in schools and within lifelong learning requires evidence-based advocacy, i.e to gather data and examples to inform and lobby.

Research needs to be an essential component of EDC policies, and cooperation between policy-makers, researchers and practitioners needs to be strengthened.

A national and European research agenda could include :

- relating human and social capital and the contribution of EDC
- analysing forms of participation and related learning strategies as EDC is not just about political involvement.
- measuring EDC outcomes and assessing the impact of EDC, as is currently done in England with longitudinal study over nine years. Is there evidence, for example, for claims heard in England, that EDC activities improves overall educational performance in schools ?
- examining the feasibility of a PISA¹⁰ study for EDC
- mapping out and analysing policies and practices of lifelong learning for democratic citizenship similarly to the Council of Europe EDC policies study
- collecting, analysing and disseminating good practices of EDC, highlighting what works, what doesn't work and why.

A European clearing house for EDC could provide for the necessary pool of information, communication, training and analysis in this area.

CONCLUSIONS

The title and purpose of this conference, NECE, is Networking European Citizenship Education.

¹⁰ Programme for international student assessment

Networking and European cooperation include exchanging existing practices, learning from others to improve one's own situation, agreeing on common approaches and actions and joining forces for lobbying concerning policy development and implementation as well as adequate support. It is a means of accountability, checking the conformity of deeds and action.

European cooperation in EDC is also a means to pool together fragmented, often isolated initiatives. Impact should be ensured through developing a critical mass, by both encouraging diversity and fostering coherence of EDC across Europe.

Finally, the primary focus of European cooperation should be to ensure the effectiveness of EDC.