

NECE – Networking European Citizenship Education, September 23 – 26, 2004, Santiago de Compostela (Spain)

Europe is growing – geographically, politically, economically and culturally. Therefore, also the topics on the agenda of civic education can no longer be treated only on a national level. Especially in the context of the upcoming “European Year of Citizenship through Education” in 2005, it is crucial that social actors and multipliers cooperate on this field and network the diversity in cultures, ideas and concepts. To work this out, the Federal Agency for Civic Education (bpb) organised the conference on “Networking European Citizenship Education” in Santiago de Compostela in Spain.

“A union without educational and cultural engagement is unthinkable and unacceptable!” This important future issue on the European agenda – as Hywel Jones from the European Policy Center in Belgium put it in his own words in one of the many vivid discussions – was agreed upon by the participants as well as the lecturers of the conference “NECE – Networking European Citizenship Education” in Santiago de Compostela in Spain (23rd–26th September, 2004). 145 participants from 26 different nations, amongst them 16 member states, eight accession countries as well as two non European countries came to the Galician pilgrim town to network in the inspiring rooms of the University of Santiago. Especially people from the new EU member states like Slovakia or the Baltic countries as well as participants from Romania or Serbia were interested in networking concepts of civic education. All of them wanted to get to know other people beyond their national borders with similar aims and ideas to exchange their experiences; and many of the participants were also looking for examples of good practices for civic education in other European countries.

In his opening speech, Thomas Krüger, president of the Federal Agency of Civic Education, underlined in the context of increasing Europeanisation the need to identify European partners and corresponding network organisations. He pointed out that the EU constitution of a multiple characterised society made a concept of a European civic education as important as never before: “The development from consuming democracy to participatory democracy is more than just a cognitive process”, said Krüger at the beginning of the conference. And indeed: There are many challenges to be met in the process of forming public opinion, combined with the growing demands of European society. This is especially true for the European Union after the enlargement and the elections of the parliament.

In the first panel which covered the perspectives of a European democracy and constitution, Remo Bodei, an expert in German classical philosophy from the Italian University of Pisa, pointed out that Europe is made of differences and that the call to unify was somewhat absurd. But nevertheless the expansion of human rights and also the adaptation of new economic structures is, as Bodei put it, a “big historical project”. In his eyes, at the end, welfare must rise of the catalyst of differences.

Malgorzata Irek, a Polish professor now working at the University of Oxford, shared some of her personal experiences of German-Polish confrontations with the audience and made clear that from her point of view, the personal contact was crucial for both sides: “Through coming into personal contact they did not hate each other any more.” In the following discussions, some controversial questions were raised like “Can democratic citizenship be build in societies without democratic structures?” or “Is Europe idealising its role, especially in the context of the still many conflictual issues in the new EU?”. But, as Malgorzata Irek put it, one mustn’t underestimate ordinary people when talking about democracy: “All people are ready for democracy; all they need is a chance.” At the end, all boils down to economy, said the Polish professor. And, as Irek underlined, democracy begins in the cradle.

Following this motto, the conference went on the next day with a workshop session, opened by a speech by Michela Cecchini, who presented the concepts and challenges for action regarding the Education for democratic citizenship in Europe (EDC). She pointed out that concepts and practices of citizenship education in Europe are characterised by both common concerns and diversity and that a shared approach to citizenship education is emerging in Europe. So diverse action is necessary to turn national and European political objectives and discourse into effective reality. Learning objectives and methods must provide a culture of human rights and democracy, social and political literacy, media literacy and the capacity for participation.

Her colleague from the European Commission, Monika Oels, agreed on many points. She stressed that people want a much more participatory, hands-on democracy: “They will not support the European project unless they are fully involved in setting goals, making policy and evaluation progress.

And they are right.” She named some examples for lifelong learning such as some projects from the GRUNDTVIG programs.

In five workshops, participants learned some more details about other projects of civic education, which were presented by various public organisations, NGOs and others. [Workshop I \(hier mit "WS I_summary" verlinken\)](#) focussed on "Organisations for European Citizenship Education (non-public sector)". About 20 participants listened to the presentation of four projects and vividly discussed topics that trouble NGOs, like finance matters or the struggle for EU funds. At the end of the workshop the participants decided to make a [statement \(hier mit "Resolution.pdf" verlinken\)](#) on the upcoming "European Year for Citizenship through Education 2005". The resolution stresses that education of citizenship is more than teaching democracy.

About 15 participants joined [Workshop II \(hier mit "WS II_summary" verlinken\)](#) "Organisations for European Citizenship Education (public sector)" and contributed to a vivid debate focussing on the responsibility for civic education and the point that citizenship as a dynamic process starts in the local community and is not a finished model.

[Workshop III \(hier mit "WS III_summary" verlinken\)](#) concentrated on "Competences in the Media and Information Society". About ten participants discussed about training the practical competence of media use as a part of civic education. They agreed that the challenges faced in this context are especially the different languages and the problem of translations and also the non-existence of media literacy.

[Workshop IV \(hier mit "WS IV_summary" verlinken\)](#) focussed on "Participatory Engagement for Increasing Voting Rates" and the relevance for promoting voting as a matter of active citizenship. The participants of this workshop proposed to organise a conference limited to the projects of junior votes.

Finally, the 25 participants in [Workshop V \(hier mit "WS V_summary" verlinken\)](#), listened to various project presentations in the field of "Education for Sustainability and Intercultural Learning" and exchanged experiences and wishes for these kind of projects.

As a highlight of the conference, the participants finally took part in a panel on the important topic of "Future issues on the European Agenda". Rafael Trzaskowski, a member of the European Center Natolin, Poland, Hans Stark from the Institute of International Relations, Paris, and Hywel Jones from the European Policy Center, Belgium, discussed the problems of the EU-enlargement, the challenges of the new constitution. Jones referred to the important role of civic education in this context and said that a big part of the budget will be spent – due to the Lisbon Agenda – on education and research. He and the other participants of the panel referred to the workshop outcome and stated that school has no monopoly on the learning process: "School has to work together with the community." And besides some controversy in details, the panel as well as the participants agreed that more investment in the younger generation is absolutely crucial.

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