

## Scenario - Workshop as a preparation for the NECE Conference 2013

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

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### Keynote

**“What are the relevant future topics of  
citizenship education in the EU?”**

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The main question “What are the relevant future topics of citizenship education in the EU?” given for my short keynote speech was accompanied by three further questions of the organizers:

1. How is the current international/European orientation of citizenship/civic education?
2. How relevant are socio-political issues for civic/citizenship education in Europe?
3. In which way civic education deals with the topic “Europe”?

Though I will try to react to these questions I must start by saying that I cannot answer them based on scientific evidence. There is, as far as I know, no empirical research either on the dimension of “European orientation” within the community of civic/citizenship education (in terms of organizations and institutions) nor on the quantity of the educational measures dealing with European issues or especially socio-political developments.

Nevertheless I will try to elaborate the following bullet points based on my experience in research and practice about what are the relevant future topics of non-formal citizenship education in the EU.<sup>1</sup>

For that, I am going to elaborate three bullet points:

- How “European” is civic/citizenship education?
- What are the European issues for the professional actors in this field?
- What are the issues of the projects of civic/citizenships education?

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<sup>1</sup> There are some answers to these questions from the point of view of formal, especially school education. F.e. recent research on “Europe” at school: Citizenship Education in Europe, published by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA P9 Eurydice). ISBN 978-92-9201-264-9. Brüssel, May 2012.

**1. How “European” is civic/citizenship education? How is the current international/European orientation of citizenship/civic education? What is meant by “civic resp. citizenship education”?**

First of all there is to be recognized that there is a great variety of actors and ‘scenes’ of civic/citizenship/EDC education in Europe. This is true for each country as well as for the European networks and communities. They work with different terms and understanding of “civic education”, “citizenship education” or “education for democratic citizenship”, and they have different approaches to European education resp. European policies.

I will try to draft a “map” of different actors in the field in order to understand the different perspectives on civic/citizenship education and the interests to “act European”.

- There are adult educators and institutions/organizations for adult education, also grass root initiatives or informal groups, which are specialized in civic/citizenship education. Some of them are focusing on special fields such as human rights education, peace education, gender issues, and education for a sustainable development. According to the fact that they are dealing with international or global issues (from EU-policies to human rights issues), they are working – and networking - on a regional, national and international level. There are networks and cooperation on the EU-level especially in the frame of the GRUNDTVIG-programme and the Europe-for-Citizens-programme. Some institutions/organizations, particularly east-European ones, have networks and cooperation in the frame of the activities and with support of the Council of Europe.
- There are adult educators and institutions/organizations for adult educational which are specialized in general education (which means everything apart from vocational training), offering civic/citizenship education as well. Though Europe/EU is a topic for those institutions/organizations, they are generally less engaged in organizing and networking for civic/citizenship education, no matter if on national or international level.
- There are youth work professionals, institutions and organizations which are specialized in youth work. Most of them have a conception of youth work being creating settings and occasions for young people to gain and perform competencies for citizenship and participation. This understanding is accepted and defined within the EU. As written down in the European council’s resolution on youth work 2010, youth work has its added value in transmitting universal values regarding human rights, democracy, peace, anti-racism, cultural diversity, solidarity, equality and sustainable development (...), it promotes social participation and responsibility, voluntary engagement and active citizenship and strengthens community building and civil society on all levels<sup>2</sup>. There are networks and cooperation on the European level, especially in the frame of the EU-programme Youth in Action.
- In addition to that, there are youth work professionals, institutions and organizations, also grass root initiatives and informal groups, which are specialized in youth work and at the same time focusing on civic/citizenship education. Again some of them are specializing in human rights education, peace education, and education for a

<sup>2</sup> Council of the European Union: Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the governments of the member states, meeting within the Council, on youth work, 3046th Education, Youth, Culture and sport Council meeting, Brussels, 18 and 19 November 2010.

sustainable development etc. Some of them are specialized in international youth work (youth exchange, European or international voluntary services etc.). These institutions/organizations are well organized and interconnected on a European level in the frame of youth work or in the frame of networks and platforms for adult education (see above; there is no well-defined distinction of age groups in Europe!).

- There is a huge and specialized variety of youth organizations. They are self-organized and they define themselves as representatives and advocacy of young people. At the same time they are offering activities in the field of civic/citizenship education. Youth organizations are organized on the European level in the “European Youth Forum”, a platform with 99 members, which is counseling the policies of the European Union. As for the Council of Europe, there is the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), representing 30 youth organizations in Europe in the frame of the “co-management-system” of the CoE. Youth organizations particularly make a claim of citizenship for young people<sup>3</sup>.

We have to notice two more features of this scene of civic/citizenship education:

- The categories are not exclusive, which means that there are professional specialists for civic education working in all organizational and thematic areas.
- In every category there are working a lot of volunteers, too, mostly in the youth sector.

In sum, you can recognize that there is a quite diverse scene of professionals and institutions. Most of them are specialized and bound to specific thematic and structural traditions. This situation makes it difficult to organize political representative bodies. There are a large networks for education in general (f.i. EUCIS-LLL - European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning) or for adult education (f.i. EAEA-European Association for the Education of Adults), as well as different networks and platforms in the field of youth work (ERYICA - European Youth Information and Counselling Agency, Youth and European Social Work Forum (or YES Forum). When it comes to civic education, citizenship education or education for democratic citizenship (or to human rights education and so on), however, we have only a few umbrella organizations on the European level, for example the Human Rights Education Youth Network (HREYN), the network Democracy and Human Rights Education in Europe (DARE) or the NECE-network (Networking European Citizenship). And you can realize even with these few examples the variety of concerns: The matter of the Human Rights Education Youth Network (HREYN) are Human Rights, DARE is mainly representing adult education, NECE has no political ambitions and is not representing anybody.

That does neither mean, however, that there is no exchange on a European level – there is! – nor that civic/citizenship education on national, regional or local level does not deal with European issues.

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<sup>3</sup> “The vision of the European Youth Forum is to be the voice of young people in Europe, where young people are equal citizens and are encouraged and supported to achieve their fullest potential as global citizens.” <http://www.youthforum.org/about-2/>.

## 2. What are the driving issues on European level for the professional actors of civic/citizenship education?

From my perspective there are vivid exchanges and debates on the European level within and, more and more, between these “scenes” I listed above. Current issues discussed on a professional level in the EDC-community are:

- The concept(s) of citizenship (What is meant by citizenship by us, by the EU, by the CoE? What is a “European citizen”? How do people (esp. young people) feel and think about that? Do they feel in a national way, do they prefer their national identity, and how much do they feel as “European?”);
- And in consequence: What is the intention of civic/citizenship education or what is education for democratic citizenship or other forms of democratic learning and experiences? What is meant by “participation” and “engagement”? What is the role resp. function of civil engagement? Is there any linkage between social and political engagement?
- The EU-concept and concrete plans of validation, both processes and instruments (certificates, passes etc. recognizing the effects of civic education);
- The question how European funding and its conditions predetermine definitions, objectives, formats, methods etc. of civic/citizenship education on European level and for European cooperation, esp. the new generation after 2013. (Please note that in some countries EDC-measures are mainly funded by EU or CoE. This has consequences for the choice of topic as well as for formats, target groups etc.)
- Professionalization and “politization” of European youth work (What should professional actors of youth work know about EU/Europe in order to create adequate formats?);
- Issues of participation, esp. the role of the various informal and non-formal participation instruments, above all when it comes to young people (What is their attitude towards politics, what do they expect for their own participation, what do they think is worthwhile and effective for a democracy - we know they value elections, but they do not go to the polls themselves but prefer informal ways of participation; they value political parties, but they do not become a member of it – they prefer other forms of representation and so on);

With regard to the political developments in Europe/EU: Of course professional actors watch the political developments in the EU as well as in a wider Europe. They discuss them as topics of educational measures or perspectives for formal /institutional reforms concerning the educational field. However, when it comes to poetical engagement of the field, there are statements and activities concerning educational policy or youth policy issues, advocating learners or citizens. The professional field does not assume political engagement (or comments on current political developments) itself as a task.

### 3. What are the driving issues on European level in the projects and events (iow for the participants/stakeholders) of civic/citizenship education)?

Speaking from the point of view of non-formal education, the issues of the participants of civic/citizenship education are, reps. should be, the topics of civic/citizenship education. From this point of view there are not, and should not be, normative ideas concerning topics of projects or other measures. In other words: The answer to the question, whether civic/citizenship education deal with topics like current sociopolitical issues, depends on how interested participants are in these issues. There are, however, typical matters of civic/citizenship education with regard to the different “scenes” I mentioned before:

- First of all, issues, even European issues, are very much related to national, even regional issues. Topics such as the role of member states within the EU, pro- or anti-European movements, the impact of European policies on national policies (f.i. in the fields of employment, economy, asylum policy, etc.) and not least human rights issues depends on specific national and individual experiences and interests.
- It is typical for non-formal learning that matters of civic education are related to the concerns of the target groups and their social environment. This is very much the case when it comes to young people. Concerning overarching European issues they (as well as many adults) are interested in:
  - a) special policy areas such as European youth policy (both EU and CoE), EU-education policy, EU-youth employment policy, etc.
  - b) matters of their future life (studying or working abroad, voluntary service abroad, freedom of movement etc.);
  - c) questions of participation in Europe, esp. non-formal participation of civil society and ways to give young people a stronger voice in Europe (platforms, networks, “structured dialogue”) (they do not think it will be enough to wait for the governmental institutions to set the agenda); that includes initiatives which offer such platforms, exchange for civic participation etc.
  - d) matters of identity (national, European identity) and of intercultural coexistence (which includes youth culture, future perspectives, how do we want to live, etc.).
- With regard to the economic crisis for many esp. young people it is an issue that the EU tends to prioritizes measures to foster employability (which is no doubt necessary and welcome, but...) instead of personal development (at this point we revert to the concept of citizenship again: What is the model of a European citizen and what is meant by citizenship? Is it more the “homo oeconomicus” or is it the autonomous, political individual?).
- Beyond that, depending on the focus and the target groups of organizations and institutions, there are specialists for human rights issues, intercultural issues/xenophobia/racism or for formal resp. institutional matters of the EU or of democracy in general.

### Provisional conclusion

As for the preceding questions and with regard to the argumentation of René Cuperus, there is no “simple” response how civic/citizenship/EDC education reacts to the objective threats of democracy in Europe. Professionals should know about it and should know how to deal with anti-democratic attitudes and people who represent them. While professionals should surely be alert to anti-democratic developments, it is not for sure that there should be, thematically corresponding – in terms of one-to-one - educations offers. Fostering democracy is the basic task for civic/citizenship/EDC education, no matter what the actual topic is. Civic/citizenship education should not be regarded as a “fire brigade” against current threats, but rather as a constantly necessary and therefore permanent institution and task.

With this in mind and with regard to the title of the conference I would recommend to listen to the questions of our addressees and to respect their concerns. In my opinion, there are a lot of starting points so that Citizenship Education and Civil Society can contribute to an empowerment of people who fight for a more democratic and citizen-orientated Europe.