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Citizenship Education in the Context of the European Union: A New Challenge for School and Adult Learning

Abstract: Serbia is approaching the European Union; the perspective of membership is becoming more and more realistic. Apart from the need to align it's economic, legal and social systems, the need to integrate itself on an even more intensive scale into the European exchange in fields like education and culture becomes obvious. Union Citizenship is such a field, even more so because it is an aspect of education which even in the "old" EU member states has not yet been fully recognised as an urgent challenge. Yet it is a task which concerns all levels of the education system – from the kindergarten to school education, higher education and adult education. For Serbian educators, it might therefore be interesting to read about the present state of reflection on Union Citizenship Education, even though the term itself might not be widely known.

Key word: european integration, european citizenship, education for democratic citizenship, adult learning.

Indeed, the question is: Are there any approaches to Citizenship Education (CE) in the European context? Is there already a kind of elementary consensus on its basic issues and principles? And is there a kind of organisational structure for CE in Europe? When looking at the situation of CE in Europe in a general sense, the answer – at least in the view of the author – to all three questions is yes. However, the matter is different when we talk about Citizenship Education in the context of the European Union. Hardly anybody has so far given much thought to the need to create a basic understanding of this new Union Citizenship Educa-

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tion. But there is no doubt that the issue is coming more and more to the fore, not only for the general reasons of rapidly progressing European integration but also for a more concrete reason: For more than ten years, citizens of the European Union have held a European Union Citizenship – but they hardly know about it. The question, therefore, reaches far into the future development and reflection in adult education generally as well as in civic education in particular.

This contribution tries to sum up some of the issues surrounding the notion of European citizenship learning, firstly in the larger framework of the Council of Europe, and secondly in the much more important context of the European Union. In this article, therefore, we need to differentiate between Civic or Citizenship Education generally (for short: CE), the Council of Europe's approach within the pan-European project "Education for Democratic Citizenship" (EDC), and the relatively new context of citizenship within the European Union, which I would like to name "European Union Citizenship Education" (EUCE).

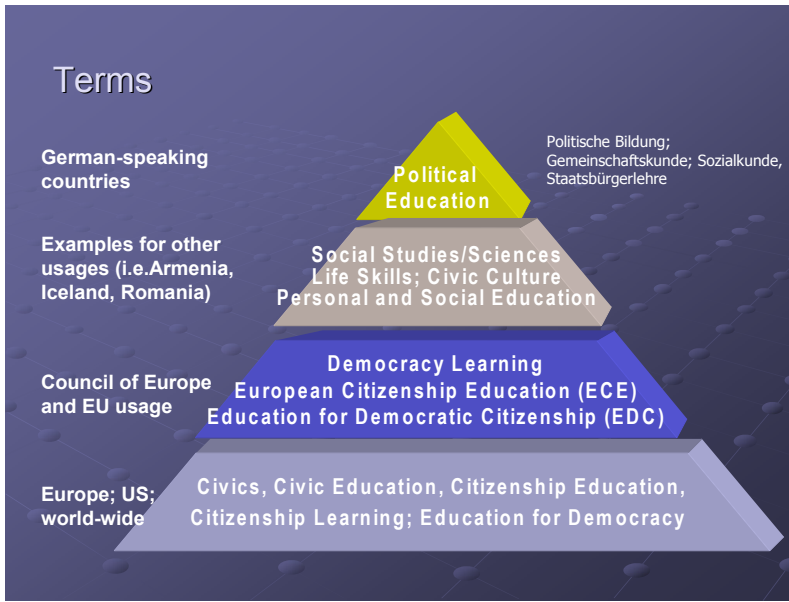
Even when talking about citizenship learning generally, we become aware of terminological difficulties and differences. In the international exchange of educational ideas, no country will be able to claim having developed a generally valid definition, indeed there is no terminological agreement on CE. The historical experience with democracy and citizenship in the 50 European states² and the institutional and political frameworks for such learning are simply too diversified to enable such an understanding.

An example for these terminological problems is the case of „Politische Bildung“. The term – literally translated "political education" – is used exclusively in German-speaking countries and nowhere else, certainly not in Eastern Europe, where the adjective "political" will be almost automatically be equalled with "indoctrination".

Even the mere denominations of the subject illustrate the differences to other countries, were termini like „Social Studies“, „Life Skills“, „Personal and Social Education“, „The World and I“ etc. are in use. Internationally, the most commonly used denominations are „Education for Democratic Citizenship“ (EDC; this is the term agreed on in the context of the pan-European project of the Council of Europe, which will be elaborated in more detail in this contribution). Other in the context of international organisations and projects frequently used terms are „European Citizenship Education“ and „Democracy Learning“. In the anglophone countries one will encounter most often the terms „Civic (or Citizenship) Education“, „Citizenship Learning“ or „Education for Democracy“.

² In the absence of a clear definition of Europe's Eastern borders, I suggest to define Europe on the basis of membership of the Council of Europe, at present 47 states including the three Caucasian nations, plus Belarus (membership suspended), Kosovo (not yet admitted), and Vatican State (observer status).

I would like to point out, however, that even where the same terms are used, different contents might occur.



Many reform societies in Central East and Eastern Europe apply more or less literal translations of English denominations. This might have been caused by the influence US-American programs exercised immediately after the revolutions in the former Communist world.

Programs like *Project Citizen*, *We the People*, *Street Law*, *Civitas* have been implemented most successfully since the beginning of the 1990s and even found their way into the curricular concepts in those countries. That was part of the democratisation strategies carried out by the US-Information Agency (USIA) in almost all post-Communist countries, from Albania to Mongolia, involving considerable financial resources – resources of which (West-)European organisations with similar intentions could only dream of. That is, of course, another reason why those programs are still in use today.

Not only do the denominations differ but also the basic premises. CE can be based on scientific or academic disciplines. In Germany, Political Science is the „guiding discipline“ of „Political Education“, while other areas like Sociology, Economics, Law are “related disciplines”. In other countries, CE is based on approaches to social learning, civic action, civil society, political engagement,

values, ethical principles, beliefs or, most frequently, on a mixture of all those premises laid down in a curriculum or educational framework.

In spite of all differences pointed out above, there are some important communalities which, in fact, make a European approach to CE possible.

- Since the systemic changes in the former Communist world, the international exchange of ideas, concepts and experience (which has been going on in the Western world for a long time, primarily as a transatlantic exchange) has increased tremendously to envelop the Eastern world as well. This created a completely new basis for the conceptualisation of international educational exchange.
- Especially in the European context, I think that the vague outlines of a basic structure of approaches, principles, criteria, initiatives and organisations become visible. It is a network which is self-sustained and does not (yet) have a definite core or management centre.
- With regard to contents, in most European countries there is some kind of basic expectation articulated with view to political-democratic education which is, at the same time, some sort of overall objective. It means that CE should transmit to its target groups (present and future citizens of a democratic society) certain competencies and skills required for their role as informed, autonomous, critical and participative citizens, empowering them to participate in a meaningful way to civil society and to provide them with the skills needed for active participation. They should be enabled to develop and articulate their own opinions and to develop a resistance to extremist or radical tendencies.
- A consensus seems to exist in Europe with regard to the not very optimistic views held in the CE community about the status and long-term perspectives of their field of work. CE is beleaguered by several shortcomings: a lack of funding resources, a certain curricular neglect and even marginalisation in the school syllabi. It is subjected to highly vacillating esteem in the educational policies. Whenever some social tensions or problems occur (integration of minorities, violence in the streets or in the schools) the politicians are quick to call for “more civic education” but are slow to provide adequate resources.
- All over Europe, educators realize that democracy is not “God-given”, nor are people “born democrats”. They must be stimulated and motivated for democratic participation in civil society. The same is true with

regard to Europe: Europeans do not generally identify with the European Union as a political system or the European integration process. With regard to the EU, this poses a relatively new problem: Even though a genuine European *Union Citizenship* has existed for more than 17 years, hardly anybody knows about it.

This article intends to outline three major aspects which, in my opinion and according to my experience, will become increasingly important to citizenship education in the European context:

1. European Citizenship and Civil Society are new and urgent challenges for education.
2. Basic concepts developed for the pan-European project "Education for Democratic Citizenship" provide a platform for the development of a "European Union Citizenship Education".
3. A basic pan-European institutional structure for European Citizenship Education is becoming visible.

European Citizenship poses a challenge to education

The Reform Treaty of Lisbon (2009/2010) is considered a milestone in the process of European integration. Not only does it attempt to streamline the Union's political system, institutions and policy fields with view to prepare Europe better for the challenges of globalisation as well as to further enlargements, in particular in the Western Balkans region, but it also steers the EU away from its fixation on a primarily economic *raison d'être* towards a new self-understanding as a political union. In particular, it promotes steps towards a democratisation of the EU and a deeper and more comprehensive involvement of its citizens.

From the viewpoint of civic educators, this latter aspect is more revolutionary than it appears to be at first sight. The EU seems to have realised at long last that an ambitious, historically unique project like the European integration process will not be successful without a basic European awareness of its citizens. Further integration will require a high degree of solidarity, empathy, even sacrifice, a general understanding of democracy and basic rights, a functioning public opinion, opportunities for participation and, last but not least, autonomous, informed and critical citizens. In the EU's new program "Citizens for Europe" (introduced in 2007), this new thinking is taking concrete shape.

At present, however, none of these basic presumptions is visible in Europe. Rather, prejudice and more or less negative dispositions towards the EU are

dominant in the public opinion: the EU is considered an undemocratic, over-bureaucratic system, lead by political elites and so-called experts, and generally an apparatus with highly developed skills in the combustion of large sums of money.

In part, it is the EU's own fault that such negative opinions exist. For many decades, the EU has neglected to explain to its citizens its own fundamentals, its truly astonishing achievements, its future perspectives. The mass media willingly reinforce negative trends by reporting primarily about problems, failures or shortcomings of European politics but hardly ever about the progress and success achieved. And the national governments of the member states are always quick to claim any progress as their own success and blame "Brussels" (i.e. the EU apparatus) with any failure.

In one regard, however, there is absolutely no doubt: There is no precedence in human history to the attempt to peacefully unite a whole continent. And there is absolutely no alternative to European Integration. In this time of globalisation, the totality of connections created by trade, finance, tourism, labour migration, cultural exchange, media, communication, sports, scientific and educational links across European borders has become so dense that the need for a regulatory framework for ever closer cooperation is self-evident. Europe is present in virtually all aspects of our daily life.

These are positive developments which, however, are in stark contrast to the lack of interest in and knowledge about Europe visible in all European societies. Many Europeans are just not interested in Europe. They know little or nothing about the continent's diversity, about the European institutions and policies, and they do not comprehend the historical importance of (or the lack of alternatives to) the unification process. Prejudice and lack of knowledge are not a good soil from which a European awareness will spring, not to mention a European "identity".

Since 1992, when the Maastricht Treaty came into force, the citizens of the EU have been invested with a "Union Citizenship". The Lisbon Treaty (2009/2010) made it a legally binding principle – but most citizens are more or less unaware of its meaning. Direct elections to the European Parliament have taken place since 1979, but over the years, the voter turnout has declined dramatically from around 75 to 50 percent. Several enlargement processes (South, East, Southeast) took place while EU citizens became ever more sceptical towards the new member states. Apparently, it does not suffice to construct European institutions, to grant certain basic participation rights or to supplement the national citizenship by a "Union Citizenship" as long as these processes are not based on a common understanding of basic values and a form of European civil society.

European symbols, hymn or passport notwithstanding, the meaning of European awareness is difficult to define. On the one hand, we Europeans experience the diversity of nations, languages, cultural traditions quite rightly as a specific wealth characterising our continent; on the other hand, we have not made sufficient efforts as yet to identify those elements within this diversity which could contribute to a European identity of values, principles and meaning. So, furthering the idea of European awareness and identity will be the core challenge for civic education in the future.

Basic approaches: From „Education for Democratic Citizenship“ to „European Union Citizenship Education“

Whenever one gets into contact with citizenship education issues in a European context, one is inevitably confronted with a much more fundamental question: What Europe do we speak of? Even though the “Iron Curtain” disappeared, our continent is still divided – in economic and social terms as well as with regard to the rule of law and democratic stability. There are enormous differences between the richest and the poorest nations, for example between Norway and Moldova.³ Similarly, historical experience with democracy, civil society and market economy etc. are very different.

Do we speak about the Europe of the Council of Europe, the oldest and by membership largest European organisation (in which 47 of the 50 European states are members)⁴, which is focused on issues like education, human rights, cultural exchange, youth and sports but has otherwise no political power? Or do we mean the Europe of the European Union with its 27 (soon 29 or 30) member states, the very magnet for all states aiming at integrating themselves into Europe’s future, an innovative supranational structure well advanced on the road to a political union? Both organisations have developed approaches to citizenship education, albeit with different aims and perspectives. Let us look at those approaches.

³ GDP per capita /year: Norway 53,000 \$, Moldova 3,200 \$.

⁴ See footnote 2.

The Council of Europe's pan-European project "Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC)"

After the systemic changes in CEE states, the Balkan wars and the sluggish democratisation process in some countries, the need and urgency for an exchange of educational experience and support of reforms was high. That is why the Second Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (1997) "decided to launch an initiative for Education for Democratic Citizenship in order to promote citizens' awareness of their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society, activating existing networks...". The project "Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC)" started in 1997 and was carried out in all member states of the CoE, albeit with different degrees of intensity.

EDC was targeted at all areas and levels of formal, non-formal and informal education with their organisations and instruments. It was meant to include adult education as well as the training sector and to involve all relevant actors in the public, private and non-governmental areas of citizenship learning.

It was carried out in (so far) four phases; phases I and II were directed at the definition of basic principles and an international exchange of experience and good practices. Even though the later phases were to promote knowledge about CE in the wider population, they did not reach the level of participation and intensity of the first two phases.

Two aspects of CE as defined in the phases I and II were of particular importance for the new democracies: (1) the democratisation of the school climate and environment, including the widening of the scope for direct involvement of students in the school government, about which the All-European Study for Democracy in the School was published⁵, and (2) the notion of Democracy-Learning as a "life-long learning concept" overspanning all areas of school and after-school education and professional training.

There are great differences between the conditions under which DL takes place, between the socialisation experience and attitudes of the actors involved and their possibilities to use acquired knowledge. Premises which may be self-evident in some national contexts might be contested or downright unacceptable in other states. That is why the development of general concepts or principles on a European level cannot and should not be based on specific national experience: Neither "fast-food programs" (mere translations of national concepts) nor "recipies" are desirable. Also, it cannot be presumed that European concepts would

⁵ Duerr, K. (2005). *The School – a democratic learning community. The All-European Study on Pupil's Participation in School*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

be equally accepted in all countries. Indeed, some countries were even reluctant to take up the recommendations.

The project has been influential insofar as it has stimulated an urgently needed debate in Europe on the basic criteria and aspects of Citizenship learning, as well as furthering an intensified pan-European exchange of experience which was urgently needed in a continent which had been separated for such a long time. Furthermore, it has successfully promoted the inclusion of CE issues in national educational laws, curricula and syllabi.

If the results of the EDC project appear nevertheless relatively vague and even simplistic, this might be due to the fact that the CoE is basically an organisation with limited influence, little power and very small resources. In particular, the CoE has no resources for funding projects. Even the EDC project itself has been from the start burdened with severe financial limitations.

Even more important is the fact that the CoE is not an integration-oriented organisation, it does not (in contrast to the EU) aim at creating a political union; it is merely an organisation to enable better cooperation between the member states in certain fields like education, culture and Human Rights. Therefore, the basic premises, recommendations, elements, tools and definitions of the EDC project – how to empower people for responsible, critical and participative citizenship in a democratic civil society – have always been directed *solely* at the national level and are thus applicable in any democratic society. In other words: The project's mandate has never been to propagate an overall vision or to stimulate a debate on European identity and coherence, nor did it promote the idea of a pan-European citizenship.

Development of a European Union Citizenship Education

In contrast to the CoE, the European Union has, at least since the Maastricht Treaty (1992) embarked on the road to a *political union*, an aim further strengthened and invigorated by the Lisbon Treaty (2009/2010). The EU grants its citizens a "Union Citizenship", i.e. a special legal status requiring a completely new and different quality and intensity of European cooperation in such fields as citizenship education. This is a very special challenge for CE, not only because it is a historically unique concept but also because the "European Democracy" still lacks a "demos" capable of exercising its rights and duties, it still lacks a European public sphere and civil society, in other words: conditions which would be essential for the longer-term stability of the Union.

Citizenship deficits of the EU

Within the EU, the lack of solid knowledge and an affective dimension of the citizens' attitude towards the EU are problems which are becoming more and more apparent. It is not enough to issue bordeaux-red passports to everyone and display European flags on all public buildings; rather, it is necessary to qualify the citizens for their role as informed and participative Union citizens who, at least in the longer term, will develop some degree of European awareness and identity which would be an indispensable condition for the sustainability of the Union, in particular if situations arose which require solidarity, as the present financial crisis shows quite clearly.

For decades, the EU distanced itself from its citizens, unable to explain its historic importance, its methods, policies, institutions and processes. The EU was being perceived as a noble club for statesmen, functional elites and experts. Up to the present day, the EU suffers from severe deficits regarding its internal democratic processes, opportunities for active participation, information and self-explanation of its policies towards its citizens, as well as a lack of knowledge on their side. As a consequence, there is a very low level of identification of the citizens with the EU as a political system.

Objectives and Contents of Union Citizenship Education

Are there special competences and skills required which supplement those traditionally transmitted through national citizenship education? I believe so, for the following reasons:

- Firstly, creating a union of so many and so different nation states is, historically speaking, a unique and unprecedented undertaking, especially since that union is acquiring more and more characteristics of a supranational entity, in fact, of a European federation. Already, the EU has provided Europe with a lasting peace; the "iron curtain" has gone and was replaced by a spirit of cooperation, even though nationalisms and more or less latent national prejudice and stereotypes still exist.
- Secondly, the regulations of the Lisbon Treaty contain issues which are not or not to the same degree contained in national constitutions. For example, the European Charter of Fundamental Rights was raised to treaty level and thus become mandatory for all member states. Furthermore, there are now regulations which are not present in some national constitutions, as in the fields of environmental protection, data security and consumer protection.

- Thirdly, the idea of a “European solidarity” is completely new and untried. The present crisis with regard to the financial situation of Greece may prove to be a first test of this solidarity. This, in turn, requires at least a certain degree of identification of the union citizens with the EU and its system – a great challenge for citizenship education.
- To ensure stability in the long term, a European civil society will be required. This would be the framework within which critical, participative and responsible union citizenship would be possible.

These are the tasks and challenges faced by European Union Citizenship Education. It is a “tall order”, no doubt, because it requires no less than transmitting European awareness as part of our political and social life. National, regional, local feelings will not be replaced but need to be supplemented by European awareness.

Competences for Union Citizenship Education

There is, however, not need to „reinvent the wheel“: national approaches, concepts, premises for Democracy-Learning and the Council of Europe’s criteria, principles and recommendations form a solid and broad starting basis for the further elaboration of Union citizenship education. The “European competence” which need to be defined would comprise cognitive, social and affective dimensions, like empathy, solidarity, tolerance on a Europe-wide level, a competence which would not only be directed at the larger vision of a united Europe but also on the everyday vision of individual life opportunities for self-realisation in the future Europe. These are the aspects which go far beyond established approaches to European learning and which must involve hitherto untried learning opportunities.

New forms of linking learning processes in school with extra-mural youth work must be developed in order to lay the foundations for citizenship learning as a life-long learning process. Adult education offers are a very important element. In seminars, summer schools, teamwork across borders, European ideas can be worked out; simulation activities like the European Youth Parliament are very interesting activities to transmit knowledge and skills while at the same time they represent ideal training grounds for linguistic and rhetoric skills and language learning.

Dimensions of European competence learning

- *Learning Europe* requires the transfer of cognitive elements which are indispensable for understanding the political and historical transformation of our continent and for the empowerment of European citizens. Such cognitive elements are, for instance, knowledge about European integration, EU institutions, politics, policies, the articulation of interests and opportunities for meaningful participation.
- *Experiencing Europe* is not difficult – we experience manifestations of this new Europe every day and everywhere – when we buy food in supermarkets or food halls, when we watch the daily news, listen to music, visit sport, cultural or entertainment events. We meet students and teachers from other countries, participate in international competitions or travel abroad as tourists or on business trips. Europe is virtually everywhere.
- *Acting in and for Europe* means to participate actively and in a meaningful way. Youth movements and voluntary groups and organisations offer many opportunities for participation on a European level, as do school networks, international teacher associations and educational projects. In adult education, many European networks and initiatives exist to participate in. European political clubs and parties are open for any citizen to join.
- *Recognising Europe* as a perspective for our lives and future is, perhaps, the most fundamental condition necessary for the development of a European spirit. European integration has been remarkably successful in establishing a borderless Europe for learning, studying, working abroad. Young people today have much higher chances of gathering international experience for their professional careers than any generation before.

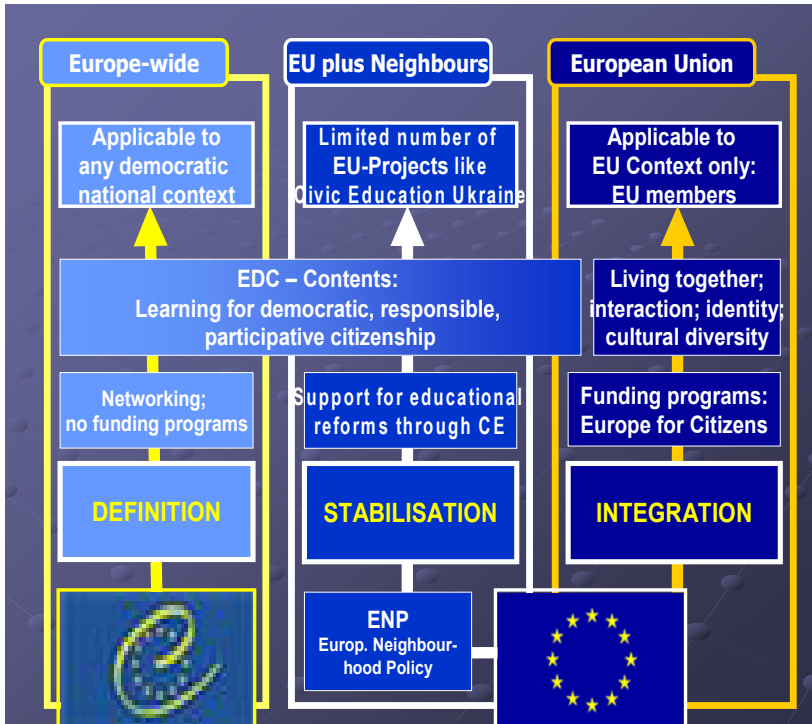
Structures of Europeanization in Citizenship Education

As pointed out above, we are not standing at the beginning. Much has already been achieved. And gradually, at least in the eyes of the present author, a structure

of CE in Europe becomes visible which, at the same time, also outlines some strategic objectives with regard to the “geographical” outreach of these approaches.

- The Council of Europe promotes the *definition and the standards* of Citizenship Learning in Europe. These are applicable to any national democratic context. However, it does not aim at creating a European citizenship.⁶
- The European Union follows quite a different strategic objective: further and deeper *integration and stronger coherence*. Its main interest is to strengthen the integration process and to convince its citizens of the need, the importance and the meaning of a European Union Citizenship as prescribed by the EU’s treaties. This is particularly important with view to the enormous discrepancies in wealth and economic performance which now, after the enlargements of 2004 and 2006, exist in the EU. Indeed, the EU has “discovered” Citizenship as an important tool and established a special program “Europe for Citizens” which aims at furthering exchanges, intercultural learning, citizen networking, cultural projects etc., based on mutual tolerance and respect.
- Through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the EU attempts to involve all countries on the outer borders of the EU in order to *create an area of democratic stability and peace*. Citizenship learning is viewed as an essential element, so a large number of projects and cooperations have been established between EU member countries and neighbouring countries like Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Another approach relevant for Democracy-learning is the Danube Strategy established in 2010 which aims at creating a better cooperation of all states in the Danube area.

⁶ See, for instance, Duerr, K., Spajić-Vrkaš, V., Martins, I. (2000): *Strategies for Democracy-Learning in Europe*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe; Duerr, K. (2005); C. Birzėa et al. (2004). *All-European Study on Education for Democratic Citizenship Policies*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.



Conclusion

The results of the EDC project, especially the studies, networks, reports and teaching aids developed, create a possible common denominator which could be seen as a basic understanding or even consensus – in spite of all the differences between the countries involved. This is indeed a viable platform for the future development of citizenship education.

It is a platform which can also be used as a starting point for the future elaboration of the new European Union Citizenship Education. The concept of the “European Citizen” must now be understood as a poly-layered concept, involving the local, the regional, the national and the European dimension of citizenship – and many perceive already a growing need for discussion about global citizenship⁷, brought about by the world-wide responsibility and need for action

⁷ See, for instance, Schumann, W. (2005). „Herausforderungen für die Demokratie-Bildung im 21. Jahrhundert“. Retrieved 03.03. 2009. from http://www.daedalos.org/EDC/newsletter/edc_newsletter_d.htm

we face with regard to overpopulation, hunger, catastrophes, human rights violations, terrorism, fundamentalism, environment protection and climate change.

Be that as it may, it is a fact that European Union Citizenship is granted to us by the Lisbon Treaty as a legal norm. Union Citizenship is not a transitory project; it is here to stay. This fact must be understood as an impetus to enlarge and widen the citizenship perspective of EU-citizens by a decidedly European dimension. In particular, it must be understood as an important requirement in the preparation of any new or prospective member state (for instance, Serbia) for accession to the European Union.

With this notion in mind, the further development and elaboration of Citizenship Learning in Europe must be seen as a chance to create a common understanding within the educational community on the approaches, principles, methods and models for European Union Citizenship Education. Similar to the wording about the Union citizenship in the Lisbon Treaty, Union Citizenship Education will not replace national approaches but supplement them.

Much has been achieved already; much more remains to be done.

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Građansko obrazovanje u kontekstu Evropske Unije: novi izazov za školu i obrazovanje odraslih

Apstrakt: Srbija se približava Evropskoj Uniji; perspektiva učlanjenja postaje sve realnija. Pored potrebe da uskladi svoje ekonomske, pravne i društvene sisteme, potreba da se u oblastima kao što su obrazovanje i kultura integriše u evropsku razmenu na još intenzivnijem nivou, postaje sve očiglednija. Građansko obrazovanje za EU jedno je od takvih polja, jer je to aspekt obrazovanja koja čak ni u „starim“ državama članicama EU još uvek nije u potpunosti prepoznat kao hitan izazov. Ipak, to je zadatak koji se odnosi na sve nive obrazovnog sistema – od vrtića, preko škole, do visokog obrazovanja i obrazovanja odraslih. Stoga bi za nastavnike i andragoge u Srbiji moglo biti zanimljivo da se upoznaju sa aktuelnim stavovima o građanskom obrazovanju za EU, iako sama sintagma kao takva možda još uvek nije opšteprihvaćena.

Ključne reči: evropske integracije, evropsko građanstvo, obrazovanje za aktivno građanstvo i demokratiju, učenje odraslih.

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