

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

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Report

Workshop 8 Lifelong Learning

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Introduction and Moderation: Mona Qaiser, Dialogue at School (Germany)
Number of participants in the workshop: 7 participants (+moderator & rapporteur)
There were four participants from the Netherlands, and three from other European countries. Most participants are working in citizenship education, from one angle or another. We had a diverse group of different ages and experiences.
Irina Ilisei (RO - Fellowship programme "Shaping Europe - Citizenship Education in Action"), Khaled Mahmood (UK - School Development Support Agency), Andreas Christ (DE – Young European Professionals), Ivo Hartman (NL – retired citizen education professional), Lidwien Vos de Wael (NL – life long learning), Tim (NL – ProDemos) and Sadie (NL – ProDemos)

Methodology: World Café

The content of the workshop No 8 arose from the morning session of World Café debates and was defined by the participants on site. Lifelong Learning was a topic that came up a few times and thus made into an additional workshop.

As this was a spontaneous workshop, Mona Qaiser recruited seven participants during the lunch break.

After the introduction round of all the participants, the discussion started with the opening statement of Mona Qaiser. The setting was very much like a World Café debate: All participants sat in a small circle and had a conversation. They contributed to questions they should address and answer. Concerning the final statements there were three papers on the floor with the central questions: current situation, desired future and who does what? The rapporteur wrote the answers to the questions on papers and structured them per question. These conclusions were written in the ether pad and used as input for the draft conference paper.

Discussion

Mona Qaiser started the discussion with a statement: "Why do we always talk about youth and not adults when it comes to citizenship education? We talk about the future and thus address youth. A bigger group in society is not addressed: adults. Why are adults in the driver's seat and have to face the big political challenges? Then the floor was open for everyone to respond.

The participants first addressed the question why youth is usually the focus point of citizenship education: They are easy to reach through schools. We need to find infrastructures and organisations through which we can reach adults. This also helps us to define what group of adults we want to reach: someone who is not in formal education.

Students are officially over 18 or 19, but they can be reached through formal education. Adults are a more diversified group: women, migrant, elderly. Moreover, the level of experience in active citizenship is more varied. Adult education also will impact young people, as kids always follow examples of adults.

Teach, learn, facilitate, working with each other?

Using the right words is important when it comes to citizenship education for adults. “Teach” can be used when you want someone to acquire a skill or obtain information. It is one directional, from a teacher to a student, rather than an exchange. And adults sometimes like to learn something, rather than being in a dialogue setting. But when our objective is to increase political involvement, we should shy away from teaching and speak about “facilitating” or “working together.” If we then go in to “teach” something, people will get scared. We should also be careful with force-feeding, because people are fed up with that. We need to diversify the instruments to fit needs.

We should also think of more unconventional ways of reaching adults. Arts and culture can be good means to communicate through as such events can take place at unexpected places and can be fun, too. One example is given of an artist who dressed up like a European civil servant and spoke to citizens about Europe in a park in Amsterdam.

Time

Time is an important constraint for adults. They have busy lives with many responsibilities. We should link citizenship education to activities they are already undertaking. The example of a Romanian theatre play was mentioned. The play is about the life of a young Roma girl. But visitors of the play are mostly middle class, non-Roma, Romanians. They learn something about Roma rights.

Another suggestion is to organise a one-day, large-scale event. In the Netherlands there is a Day of Democracy, where all municipalities organise an open house. The good thing about this Day of Democracy is that the events are interactive, and political issues are linked to personal situations. The successful Day of Public Transport, when public transport in Germany is free for everyone, should serve an example.

A question that was raised but left unanswered: Considering that adults have limited time, how can we engage them sustainably, i.e. for the long term and not during a one-time event?

Current situation

Not too much is currently happening in terms of citizenship education for adults. Until a few years ago, migrants in the Netherlands had to take a course in Dutch citizenship. But this course is no longer obligatory and migrants have to pay for it themselves. In the UK migrants have to pass an exam, too. But they read a book and check the right boxes on the exam. Is this how democracy works?

Citizens are included more and more in decision-making, because of participatory democracy. This is also a way of learning: listening, voicing your opinion, learning about different perspectives, policy-making process, and policy. Citizenship education is not the objective of these processes, but an indirect effect.

In the past, the “volksuniversiteit” or “Volkshochschule” were places where adults would go to in order to learn something. But this was mostly to increase their employability or learn a new hobby. Trade unions, women’s and environmental movements were strong in the past, but less now.

Nowadays, we have to present citizenship education differently, because people are not always actively looking for a “lesson” and also the society seems less interested in politics. It should be fun being linked to current affairs (e.g. local elections) or question yourself: What do you want in your neighbourhood?

At ProDemos, the best challenge is to interest kids who are actually not interested. Every person is political, but not necessarily explicit. We should approach adults in the same way as kids: What is my personal interest and how is it connected to politics? How does it

translate into real life?

Another example is the Lowlands University. During a pop festival, (former) politicians are hailed as rock stars when they give a lecture on a political issue. The “Wahl-O-Mat” is fun, a great conversation starter and not too much in-your-face.

In Germany you can take five days off from work to get training. This can also be used for citizenship education. In the UK there is a duty service in court.

What is lifelong learning?

It could be one workshop, but is it also a video on Facebook? Picking up something new is different from reviewing something. We should focus on the latter as it is more in-depth and thorough.

Funding

In Eastern Europe we should also educate governments: They need to realise that citizenship education is important in a society and that they should make funding available for this. In Germany political parties are fairly rich and have foundations that are loosely connected to them. But this is not the case in all countries.

What structures can we use?

Citizenship education for youth is often done through schools. What structures and organisations can we think of to reach adults for citizenship education?

Political parties play an important role, but mostly only for members. A great example of citizenship education by mass media comes from Pakistan. Media campaigned “Vote for Pakistan.” They encouraged citizens to vote, regardless for which political party. Faith organisations are still important. In the past, churches and other physical places of worship were important, but nowadays it is more about the networks around religion. Chamber of commerce is a place through which you can reach people in Germany. But in the Netherlands they are not political at all.

At first there were some discussion, but in the end participants found that social clubs (sports clubs) also provide opportunities for citizenship education. They may not be political at first sight, but in several ways they are quite good for citizenship education. For example, a football association lobbies for a new football field. Social clubs have mobilising power but how can you relate this to citizenship education? Next to this you learn social skills through (team) sports: team play, diversity, personal growth because you get recognition from others for what you do. Moreover, sport clubs are experts when it comes to homophobia and racism. We should use their expertise. While in Romanian football clubs, discrimination is still very strong, in Germany this was banned in ten years’ time. In the UK, cricketers have reached out to youth to encourage them to go back to school.

Social media is not suitable for a good quality discussion. But it is useful to mobilise the masses. And in a country where media is less free, social media is an important source of information. In Romania the director of the public TV is appointed by the leading political party. It did not report the large demonstrations at Rosia Montana. Additionally, social media not only mobilises existing structures, but can also create new networks.

Future

The participants came up with several ideas for programs to reach adults. Firstly, we should do researches on citizenship education for adults, what could be done by organisations like ProDemos and the bpb. Also it could be funded by the European Union. Next to this we could make a program comparable to the European Voluntary Service for adults so that employed, but also unemployed and retired people can develop their citizenship skills. Employees should get time off from work to participate in this. In prisons we can also reach many people. So we should offer workshops there.

Other questions

Several interesting questions came up, but due to lack of time participants could not address them properly.

What do we want adults to pick up from citizenship education? Are skills (getting) more important than knowledge? Do we want to encourage them to engage themselves? Do we want to help them to find the right political party (like vote match)? Looking at the four scenarios will be less relevant. And in Romania there is no option for the right party. What do we do then with citizenship education for adults?

Do we focus on people who are already interested or even active, or do we want to engage the disengaged ones? How can we engage adults sustainably, taking account of their lack of time?

Key statements and main conclusions

- 1) Adults should be a target group for citizenship education, too. But since the 1970, there are less and less little structures through which we can reach them.
- 2) We should find new structures through which we can reach adults. For example, we should create a European Voluntary Service for adults, including time off work. We should build platforms and networks where active citizens can find each other. And we should offer citizenship education courses in prison.
- 3) Many existing organisations have to play an important role in citizenship education. From faith organisations to media, they can reach adults. Moreover, governments and organisations on citizenship education should do researches about the needs and opportunities for citizenship education for adults.