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Life-world-Oriented Citizenship Education –
A Paradox or a Necessity?

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I. What does Life-world-orientation mean?

Life-world-orientation is one of the leading paradigms in current social pedagogy (Thiersch 2005; 2011; Grunwald/Thiersch 2009). It stresses the need to *understand* and *support* citizens in leading their daily lives. The leading of life is understood as an ongoing project between influences of individual *life-worlds* and the official institutions and organisations of the *system*. In this context, life-worlds do make *sense* to the individuals, although this sense sometimes can only be understood within the context of system influences. To gain a broader understanding, life-world-orientation follows a hermeneutic approach that tries to *understand* individual activities as attempts to cope the leading of life within social contexts

II. Current challenges between political systems and individual life-worlds

Political theorists describe a tendency of the vanishing of the political (e.g. Crouch 2005). Especially in European countries we find tendencies of a less interest in political participation and a shrinking political understanding and knowledge in different population groups. Also we experience lower qualities of social cohesion, integration and solidarity in most European societies (e.g. Bauman 2000). On this background, the whole idea of citizenship seems to come under threat.
In the same time, we also experience increasing levels of social polarization. A growing number of people experience marginalization and disintegration or fall under the category of "the superfluous" that are no longer needed in our existing economy and society (Bude/Willisch 2007). Under such life conditions, balances of mutual recognition are getting lost and it is not surprising, that affected groups often develop hostile opinions against our form of democracy and the current political system (Mouffe 2005).
But there are also signs of continuous political affiliation: Youth studies show an ongoing political interest in their target groups and new forms of citizen protest like the "Occupy" movement or new party formats like the "Pirates" show that the interest in political activity still exists amongst young people but might need new forms of articulation.

III. Can citizenship be taught after all?

For the context of citizenship education, the tensions between life-worlds and system offer new challenges and possibilities. The pedagogue Gert Biesta (2011) proposes a new understanding of political education that moves from "teaching citizenship" towards "learning democracy". He doubts the possibility to teach citizenship and identification with political systems through the plain mediation of knowledge and facts.
Rather he argues to start at the current and urgent everyday issues that young people experience in their daily lives. In this sense, it seems necessary to re-shape citizenship education in a life-world-oriented projects that are situated closer to the everyday life of the target groups.

IV. Empowerment: Learning democracy in social contexts

Biesta also gives first conclusions of what his approach could mean:
a) The need to create new settings. Instead of working with individuals, settings of groups or neighbourhood based learning are much more suitable for his approach of social learning. This leads us to a spatial orientation of learning (Deinet 2009, Kessl/Reutlinger 2007) and connects to new forms of peer education and participative pedagogy.

b) The shift from "having citizenship" to "doing citizenship". Learning democracy means to identify issues of common concern within learning groups and to search for suitable forms of debate and common strategies. In this sense, citizenship education would mean the re-discovery of the idea of the *Agora* within the everyday lives of the target groups.

c) The braveness and possibility to be risky. Open learning environments lead to open outcomes. Amongst positive effects they also could lead to discover anti-democratic opinions, prejudices and opinions that are directed against the dignity of certain groups of people. Political education certainly follows the hope to convince individuals about democratic values, but the risk of failing or even supporting anti-democratic values remains as a challenge for the field that has to be realized and drafted.

V. Practical possibilities: Social space analyses and spatial concept development

To raise understanding of life-worlds and social conditions, it is very helpful to undertake social space analyses with different target groups (Deinet 2009; Krisch 2009; Spatscheck/Wolf-Ostermann 2009; Spatscheck 2012). Here, especially the following methodologies are helpful:

- *Structured walks/city walks* with target groups to find out about daily life-world-experiences
- The "*needle method*" that uses maps and needles that are pinned by target groups to symbolize certain qualities of places and spaces
- The paining of "*mental maps*" or "*subjective maps*" that show "inner pictures" about life-world-situations
- "*Peer group grids*" or "*target group grids*" that gather information and opinions about certain groups or milieus in the neighbourhood from the perspective of the involved groups
- Activating *interviews* with qualitative and quantitative design
- *Participant observations*
- *Autophotography* of pictures of typical life situations that are shared and debated amongst involved groups

- *"Time budgets"* or *"time charts"* that show amount of time spent at different places and organisations
- Interviews with *key persons* and local *life-world experts*
- Surveys on and analyses of *institutions* from user's or neighbour's perspectives
- Secondary analyses of existing *social data*
- etc.

For further descriptions of the methodologies refer to Spatscheck/Wolf-Ostermann 2009 or the "Methodenkoffer" of the open access journal www.sozialraum.de.

Based on the results of the social space analyses, groups can start to identify common issues and interests and develop common goals and strategies of local social development (Reutlinger 2008). Here it is very helpful to build on suitable forms (e.g. activating media work, forums, world cafes, community workshops, open spaces, etc.) and to network for common solutions with other target groups and supporting partners.

VI. Life-world-orientation needs structural support

Approaches of life-world-orientation should not be understood as individualising practice that enables young people to cope with lives within unsuitable societal conditions. To be credible, life-world-oriented citizenship education needs to be supported by a clearly visible and experienceable youth policy on European, national and local levels. Therefore, the title question needs to be modified: Life-world-oriented approaches to citizenship education have become a clear necessity – but this necessity can only be realized on the basis of youth policies that provide real perspectives for young people to become fully part in our societies.