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Different discourses of citizenship – teachers and trainers in several European countries

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The importance of teaching active citizenship mounts with the increasing level of diversity in multicultural societies, because such education can act to solder or tie together existing citizens and newcomers. In the European context, the significance of a sense of citizenship has also grown with the enlargement of the European Union in May 2004. This paper considers teachers and trainers professionally working in societies with groups of different cultural backgrounds. What do they think about citizenship and how do they perceive it? This was the main research question in a qualitative inquiry conducted within the framework of an international project on Trainers of European Citizens. The research findings show the reasoning teachers and trainers gave to questions of citizenship, common European identity and the integration of immigrants. Partners in the project came from eight European countries, making it possible to compare the different discourses of citizenship (imagined and constructed) by teachers from various countries. European citizenship is conceived as a very important concept: nevertheless it is not built without difficulties.

Contemporary social science debates on citizenship cannot be viewed without reference to questions of culture and identity (Hall, 1992; Stevenson, 2001). George Schöpflin (2004) points to fifty years of public discourse on the inseparability of the institutions (or forms of agency) of culture and politics despite this, he argues that one of the greatest successes of Europe as a culture is the ability to *combine* an extreme level of cultural diversity with similarly diversified forms of political power. There is no other part of the world that consists of so many cultural communities that are autonomous political communities. The question remains as to where the line should be between these two types of communities. The interconnectedness of citizenship (in the sense of political belonging) and culture (in the sense of belonging to a cultural group) is a significant part of the analysis presented here.

On the research

The research pilot came from a qualitative approach, and was based on semi-standardised interviews which consisted of prepared discussion areas. The themes were widely discussed with team partners and all contributions and suggestions were taken into account. Some issues were seen as particularly important (citizenship, immigrants' problems in everyday life), while others were less a priority (eg ethnicity).

Semi-standardised interviews were conducted in eight European countries involved in the project, carried out in the particular region where a partner organisation was located. Conversational partners were then found among willing colleagues and partners of the cooperating organisations, in schools, adult-education institutes, refugee centres. The sampling technique and size[1] were designed not to cover the complete structure of trainers in 'our' regions[2], but more to look for ideas and for the contents trainers and teachers

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[1] The number of interviewed respondents varied from 3 to 5 persons per region.
[2] 'Our' refers to all the partner regions.

include on the topics of Europe, immigrants and citizenship. Nevertheless, we did examine groups of respondents in the project countries. All respondents were in touch with an intercultural environment, where members of different cultures could meet and communicate with each other.

Belgian respondents (10) all had experience of an intercultural environment, ranging from 2 to 20 years. They consisted of intercultural trainers and language teachers or other teachers. One of them said that they were of a different ethnic origin.

Czech respondents (4) were a more varied group: as well as teachers of Czech for immigrants. There were social workers and a person working in a refugee centre. Different focuses on the problem were taken up; teachers demonstrated more optimism than social workers as trainers towards inclusion, pointing to the state's immigrant policy as being one of uncertainty, and the problems with the very divergent attitudes of natives toward immigrants.

German respondents (3) included teachers who taught young people of the second generation of immigrants. They meet different problems than their colleagues in countries where mass immigration is still seen as rather new and strange. What was interesting and important in their reactions was a strict refusal to answer questions about intolerance, to which they were very sensitive. Older research tools did not work: societies are changing.

Spanish respondents (7) had many experiences in their work as teachers and social workers: the typical attitude was of tolerance towards political immigrants and lack of interest in reflecting on European identity. As one of them said, 'we do not care about it that much'.

French respondents (6) came from the academic sphere – teachers, trainers and a university official. (In France and Germany people of non-native origin were found among our respondents, reflecting the shift towards a more intercultural society.) As with the German respondents, the French were sensitive to and unwilling to answer questions about race and ethnicity. It is understood as not 'politically correct' to do this in public discourse.

Greek respondents (5) were in touch with immigrants through language teaching and translation. Important issue of racism appeared again, though in a different way to that found in the Czech Republic. People were cautious about questions on tolerance, feeling the pressures of a multicultural ideology. The Greek team concluded '...in reality we all know what 'good' answers are, and people are tempted to give them for reasons of self-interest – to get a job or because they do not want to be labelled as racist'.

Lithuanian respondents (6) were from various professions – teachers, ministry officers and a coordinator of refugee affairs. The Lithuanian colleague noted that many questions were seen as quite unusual by some respondents (such as definition of citizenship and immigrants' problems), because those issues are still a new experience in Lithuania (as in the Czech Republic).

Swedish respondents (5) were mainly language teachers for immigrants. As in France, Germany and Greece, it was difficult for them to answer some questions, which did not work in Swedish society because they seemed outdated – for example, not separating the

concepts of *ethnicity* and *nationality*, which is more commonly done in West European countries and Scandinavia[40].

A brief data analysis

The research discussion areas we identified were what is the main focus for trainers working with people of different cultural background? What kind of problems do immigrants face, in the trainers' perception? What do trainers think is meant by 'citizenship'? What do they see as being a part of Europe mean? What is their view of the differences between national identity and European identity?

Our analysis of the data on the main focus of trainers' needs divided answers into categories and subcategories. The first group of suggestions can be described as methodological and pedagogical: calls for a unified methodology, adapting teaching material specially for the needs of immigrants, training courses, basic psychology for developing communication skills (especially language competencies).

The common denominator in these was a need for better communication between trainers and their immigrant clients. Contemporary pedagogy sees communication as culture, and *vice versa* (Hall 1973). Because we communicate through words and gestures, the most important agent of communication is language and symbols of body language. 'Language, that is, communicative competence, … reflects and reinforces a particular view we hold of the world' (Fantini 1997: 11).

Calls for adapting teaching material for members of different cultures might sound strange to the West European trainer: this demand was most often articulated by respondents from the Czech Republic and Lithuania. We found that German and Swedish professionals used the same materials for all students, and we need to differentiate the curriculum of classic subjects and materials for teaching intercultural communication, because they teach second and third generation migrants, and do not feel lack of intercultural teaching material. In Greece, France and Belgium, the use of specialist material for immigrants was dominant. Two Belgian respondents complained of the lack of such material, pointing to the quality of Dutch teaching materials. Trainers in Spain used both special and adapted materials. Particularly responsive groups of trainers kept trying to adapt their standard material to meet the needs of immigrants – Lithuanian teachers were typical in this honourable endeavour.

A second group of statements show a more practical and real-life set of issues which touch more on social policy. These lead from problems that are manifest to those that are latent: among problematic spheres is a lack of interest by the home (dominant) populations, racial attacks and other forms of discrimination. More latent issues are seen in practical approaches toward members and families of immigrant groups. A Belgian respondent criticised the bureaucratic systems around housing problems and financial support. It is clear these problems cannot be solved by trainers.

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[40] In Central and East Europe, the development of nationalism took a different form – new 'nation' states included many ethnic groups and the one who dominated became a state-building nation.

Trainers put forward a simple but important idea to help make the situation better – to put 'real' emphasis on integration and participation. Trainers see the start of the process of possible participation in the cultivation of language skills and in familiarisation with different cultures. A Czech social worker pointed to the need to encourage settled migrants in practical and citizenship activities to build up social networks and fully working communities. German teachers specified this more concretely when they mentioned the importance of professional orientation in helping with job seeking, and security through the provision of basic rights of immigrants, including permanent right of residence.

Citizenship

The question of citizenship opened up many interesting ideas and opinions. Belgian and Swedish respondents connect this with the motive of belonging to a particular community; one of the Belgian respondents changed the question and corrected it with the answer: 'You are not *becoming* a citizen, you *are* a citizen!' Thus, belonging is viewed as an essential feature, although, in a case of immigrant, one becomes a citizen through a long journey. In the same way, inhabitants of the new member countries are also becoming citizens, from different positions. The social scientist Renato Rosaldo (O'Toole 2000) opens up the debate on 'second-class' citizenship when he speaks of the feelings of some members of immigrant communities based on their everyday experiences. In this sense, citizenship is not just 'a matter of documents'.

French and Spanish trainers talk about citizenship as a way of being part of society, about integration. An interesting shift in meaning occurs in the French conception of *integration*, which seems to be understood as a synonym of *assimilation*. On the other hand, assimilation is generally seen as affiliation to the new culture with the parallel abandonment of previous norms and institutions, so it is considered as an 'antithetical master frame' (Berbrier 2004) to the pluralism which is presupposed in integration. David Bell shows that the French meaning of assimilation in language use, uncovering its historical roots, is positive and inclusive: 'They did not consider language a primordial, determining element of national character but, rather, a sign of full assimilation into community created on the basis of political will' (1995: 1404). This was written about the development of national identity in the 19th century, though they can be used in the contemporary context of significance of language.

We can find some similarities in the understanding of citizenship by Lithuanians and Czechs – a residuum of the connection to the nation state is still present (patriotism, nation), and the meaning of honouring the law (adhering to the rules) is very important – this characteristic is also common among Greek respondents. This latter feature may be understood as a heritage of totalitarianism in Lithuania and Czechia, probably empowered by the problems of social and economic transformation. The common discourse in all three countries seem to point to the importance of law and order with a reference to the behaviour of immigrants. This calling for strengthening order has a certain logic: post-socialist countries have faced an increase in crime rates, as does Greece.

German built their famous '*Ordnung*' (order) through an awareness of right and of duties. They extend the political-legal notion of citizenship (as do some Lithuanians) to the cultural level when they describe it as sharing a common linguistic and cultural identity. We can see an important shift from the traditionally primordial conception of citizenship,

through a weakening of the significance of ethnic identity, which now becomes rather a private issue than a public one.

European Identity and National Sentiment

For those who predict the ending of the nation state and fear the loss of national identity, this information will be quite unexpected. But others will not be surprised. Our respondents' answers are evidence that a national identity is still stronger than a European one, even among such cosmopolitan people as trainers and teachers. We will not deal with strength of such feelings, because our sample is small and this was not our aim. Of interest is the textual content of statements about relationships to the home country and to Europe (European Union).

The causes of a certain indeterminateness and even lack of interest towards a European identity can be sketched. Critical voices refer to the incomplete construction of Europe, and many articles in various publications (from the popular to the scientific) reflect on the 'crisis' of the European Union. For example, a Swedish respondent connects the notion of the European Union only with corrupt bureaucracy and a huge wasting of tax.

Countries new to membership of the European Union constitute a special case (Lithuania and the Czech Republic). Respondents from these countries try to handle this new discourse: some see no problem in being members of a nation state and of the EU at a time, while others consider the differences and inequalities caused due to historical events too great – many people from 'Europe' but not from the EU never forget passing through the special corridor at the border checkpoint ('for non-members of EU').

The anthropologist Chris Shore (2004) has particular insights on European identity and citizenship. He is sceptical of the EU's idea of supranational citizenship and describes the gap between this idealistic idea and its continuing practice as being one of 'benign despotism'. Notwithstanding this, politicians keep repeating that it will 'bring the Union closer to its citizens'. But the cultural content of the concept of a common European identity has not yet been completely filled, so the European citizenship stands on legs of clay. It is a long way – not 'to Tipperary' – but to European citizenship...regardless of whether we want to hear it or not.

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