Introduction by Steve Austen, Pilsen 2005, Panel 2.

**Citizens, cities and citizenship education**

HOW ASfE WILL INCLUDE THE CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION COMPONENT IN ALL ITS ACTIVITIES a matter of creating more awareness of the education capacity among initiators of civic initiatives all over Europe, especially on local level, in the cities where they are based.

THE EUROPEAN CITY: A COMMON ORIENTATION FOR ITS CITIZENS

In an ever increasing mesh of national, regional and urban interdependencies in Europe, the

early medieval citizen seems to be a good starting point for thinking about the meaning of European citizenship and forms of citizenship education. The concept of citizen harks back to the Latin *civis*, a member of the *civitas*, a political community that is not necessarily tied to a particular territory.

**Citizenship and Europe**

Citizenship as it will gradually have to be expressed in the EU, will lead to a complex discussion that makes it difficult to make hasty decisions. That immediately explains the attraction and the problematic acceptance at the same time of the European concept: how the future will look is partly up to us. This process makes the greatest demands on the cultural competencies of Europeans. For many the idea of European citizenship is new and one of the reasons why it is vigorously rejected by large groups of voters in almost every member state. Nevertheless, these defensive phenomena are part of an inevitable cultural process that marks the transition from exclusively national to more European solutions.

In such cases, in spite of the alleged scepticism about Europe, it is increasingly common for citizens to not take everything that their national governments consider to be in the national interest lying down.

They know, after all, that they have the backing of citizens elsewhere in Europe . (In legal perspective the citizenship of the EU that has been laid down in the treaty regulations and accepted by their own government is fostering the rights and responsibilities of the citizens nowadays.)

It is thus logical for the public space in Europe to be increasingly full of initiatives from (young) European citizens who point to the ‘value community’ that must form the core of every society at local, regional, national or international level.

IT STARTS AT HOME

To begin with at home: in the cities were citizenship found its origin. Supported by the overwhelming citizens initiatives in practically all fields of society; from pop-up restaurants, temporarily alternative spaces. Informal interregional networks, social design modeling pilots, a multitude of start- ups where international cooperation is practised. All these initiatives are having their influence on the renewal of our cities from bottom-up. The daily practise of all these proofs of active citizenship should be seen as part of the process of giving form to entirely new concepts, of communication, information, cooperation and participation with governments and citizens of 28 democratic member states. This necessitates a continuous process of trial and error and harmonisation. And of course ‘Education Permanente’. Perhaps the best comparison is with the procession to Echternach, in which the pilgrims progressed by taking three steps forwards and two steps backwards – a good exercise in European progress.

WHERE CITIES FOR EUROPE COMES IN

The above observations should be seen in the light of recent activities of ASfE; the repositioning of citizenship in a European context since the Lisbon Treaty, and last but not least the growing unrest within the population of the European member states leading to populist political initiatives, which so far, are not capable to answer the need for identification with a comprehensible idea of “binding” between the (European) citizens. Where traditional political parties are losing ground, the civil society must take up the challenge to offer modes of identification, sharing and optimism in the direct surrounding of the citizens.

This all is influencing the agenda for the coming years of Felix Meritis Foundation itself, the civic initiative , I am a Permanent fellow of, but also of A Soul for Europe and its activities: in Berlin, during the up-coming Berlin Conferene but of course also through the multitude of actions with partner organisations elsewhere in Europe.

THESE ACTIVITIES SHOULD MERGE WITH THE” CITIES FOR EUROPE “PROJECT as well as the other way around: Every activity from ASfE than will have a well prepared presentation of good/best practices of interregional activities connecting citizens, NGO’s and businesses on the local level with those from other cities elsewhere in the country or/and abroad.

The support for an intensifying of this model will lead to an interesting, growing platform for all these examples of best practices, it offers ASfE an excellent possibility to open up its Strategy Group for interested ‘pioneers’ from these best practice examples and through that a network of civic education ambassadors.

The platform activities in itself are excellent opportunities to spread the message of ASfE, which in itself is an example of citizenship education by citizens for citizens.

MORE FOCUS ON THE ROLE OF THE CITIZEN IN LINE WITH ASfE CORE BUSINESS

The nature of ASfE, as an example of a Europe wide civil society initiative, provides a natural basis to take up the challenge to add a dimension to the motto that derived from its constitution ten years ago: The political unification process of Europe only will be successful if it is understood as a cultural process.

Cultural in this context means: civic, a process that should include the broader civil society. Following this line and taking into account the various round-tables of ASfE , called Forum X, the involvement of civil society participants should not only be intensified during the Forum itself, the ‘after sales’ should be taken up by ASfE , more in particular in its project Cities for Europe.

Although ASfE has promoted the necessity of bottom up activities, especially in the cities that were part of the ECOC project, the redefinition of involvement of local authorities is only in its pre preliminary phase. The role of the city and the citizens in building Europe finally is not recognised by too many local authorities. ASfE therefore should focus on two aspects: 1. The role of the city and 2. the stimulation of bottom up initiatives in all social and cultural fields. The activities under 2. are in itself fostering European citizenship and through their international networks assisting local authorities to discover and implement point 1.

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