

Citizenship and Youth in Europe: Research or Politics?

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The answer to the question posed in the title is self-evident: linking citizenship, youth and Europe is both a research question and a political affair. One might wish for more research and less politics; one might hope that the politics is well-informed by research findings; but whatever the links between the two, they are inevitably interwoven and are both inescapably entwined in the dash to visualise, understand and respond to the complex processes of contemporary modernisation in which both Europeanisation and globalisation are embedded. Articulating the conjunction between citizenship, youth and Europe is less straightforward, and arguably a more purely political issue.

During the 1990s, public discourse has seen a gradual terminological shift from speaking of 'citizenship with a European dimension' to 'European citizenship'— although it would be more correct to use the phrase 'Union citizenship', as official European Commission documents consistently do but which writing beyond academic legal circles seldom does. It is generally acknowledged that the process of building a People's Europe began with the 1985 Adonnino Report, which essentially argued that European integration could not rest solely upon economic foundations. At that time, the direct benefits accruing to citizens from EC membership were sparse and were mainly restricted to mobility provisions for paid workers between Member States together with the promise to dismantle internal border controls. This prompted a chain of thinking about identity and citizenship with a European dimension which, whilst generally inconclusive, certainly cast down initial roots in the orientations adopted by education and youth action programmes developed in the second half of the 1980s. From the outset, these actions promoted exchange and mobility for young people in formal education and through non-formal youth activities. Their intention was to broaden knowledge and horizons, and to promote intercultural learning experiences. These aims are closely linked to the idea of citizenship as participation and engagement, which have indeed become defining features of learning for citizenship in the context of Community education and youth action, and to a somewhat lesser extent in vocational training action, which has a longer a rather differently accented history.

However, it was not until the 1993 Maastricht Treaty that Union citizenship was formally introduced in terms of a small number of additional rights conferred on Community nationals.¹ It cannot be said that

¹ Para. 8 (Part II, TEU) defines the rights enjoyed by Union citizens. These are: the right to move and reside freely in all Member States (8a); active and passive voting rights in municipal elections in the country of

these provisions attracted much direct public attention at the time, although they have lent considerable impetus to the renewal of academic debates on the concept and practice of modern citizenship, most particularly in political philosophy and political science circles. These debates centrally involve a reconsideration of classical approaches to citizenship, and in particular, exploring the potential of post-national concepts of citizenship in order better to accommodate multiple identities/belongings and to counter the inherently exclusionary consequences of current institutional and cultural practices in mobile and multiethnic societies. Be that as it may, the information available to date with reference to adult citizens as a whole shows that exercise of the rights conferred by the Maastricht Treaty has so far been disappointing.² Part of the problem lies in their incomplete implementation in practice by the Member States, but it remains the case that citizens are neither sufficiently aware of their entitlements, nor do they exercise these effectively.³ The 1997 Young Europeans Eurobarometer survey did not look specifically at this issue; earlier surveys in this series had unequivocally demonstrated that young people's factual knowledge about the European Union is very patchy and that formal education had not convincingly filled the cognitive gaps in this respect. However, the 1997 survey does show that young people, in their own view at least, get their information about their rights and responsibilities as European citizens above all from the television and only secondarily from print media or formal education. Public authorities, at whatever level, are not seen as an information source, and youth organisations rate little better.⁴

More generally, the survey findings show a mixed picture of young people's perspectives on the European Union and its meaning in their lives. There are information, knowledge and skills gaps on the part of many young people as far as the Union itself is concerned, but also in the more general terms of the demands of living in an integrated Europe. The resources for meeting those demands (for example; language skills, access to NCIT, mobility experiences) are unequally spread across the Community's youth population, whether geographically, socially or educationally. Furthermore, young

residence (8b); the right to diplomatic protection in countries where the citizen's own Member State is not represented (8c); the right of petition to the European Parliament and to appeal to the Ombudsman (8d). A further article (8e) provides for the strengthening of these rights and the addition of new ones in future.

² Second Report from the Commission on Citizenship of the Union, COM(97) 230 final, 27 May 1997.

³ 1996 Eurobarometer findings (Nos. 45 and 46) indicate that fewer than one-third of citizens feel themselves to be well-informed about the Union, and that there is considerable uncertainty about the rights they actually do have. Most know they have the freedom to study, work and live in other Member States, but beyond this, uncertainty dominates. Awareness of the political rights conferred by Union citizenship is lowest of all: fewer than two-fifths know that they can vote in local elections in another Member State in which they reside. However, it is important to add that on average, about four-fifths of citizens across the Union have little confidence that they can influence the political process, whether at European or at national level. There are marked differences between Member States in this respect, with citizens in southern Europe typically more optimistic for all levels of politics and those in the Nordic countries more optimistic for national than for European level politics.

⁴ Except in Luxembourg and France, where young people also report an above average participation in youth organisations and youth exchanges. Young Nordics report high frequency use to a broad range of information sources — and they are least satisfied with the effectiveness of European-level sources. Young Greeks are in the opposite position: they feel less informed all round, but think that European agencies are more effective than national level sources.

people's attachment to European integration is typically pragmatic rather than idealistic — yet on the whole, they are positively disposed towards the process, in particular because of the opportunities for studying and working abroad that Community policy and action bring, but also because they hope that Community-level action can help to improve their employment chances and prospective standard of living.

On the whole, however, it is probably reasonable to argue that research into citizenship and youth in Europe has not yet caught up with its current ascendancy as a political theme, the current rash of recent and ongoing national and comparative studies notwithstanding. This political ascendancy has arisen in response *both* to the abundant evidence of young people's distancing from and disillusionment with institutionalised democratic culture *and* to deepening social and economic polarisation of life chances and risks, a process which has clearly taken on an intergenerational dimension and which itself may become more entrenched in the future. The post-Maastricht crisis of confidence in European integration added a new dimension of urgency to the need for some critical reflection on how to convey authentically and to practise effectively the political commitment to promoting social cohesion in a Citizens' Europe as well as maintaining the drive to enhance competitiveness and managing structural change in European economies. Paying more attention to citizens and their needs and demands is one element of the policy response to these complex trends. Hence considerable effort has been put into campaigns to provide information and advice to citizens about their rights and how to claim these in practice (implemented largely through DGX). Social affairs, regional and employment policies and actions have placed increasing importance on rights of access to and equal opportunities in the labour market and social benefits as the foundation for active participation on equitable terms (implemented largely through DGV, DGXVI; but also increasingly DGXXII for vocational training). And in the fields of education and youth, the response centres on gaining the competences and the confidence needed to participate proactively and responsibly in complex societies and cultures which nevertheless share a set of fundamental democratic values.

So far, so good. But these kinds of statements can all too readily slip towards imprecise rhetoric when they are not embedded in secure theoretical and empirical informing frameworks. And this is where we begin to have a serious problem. Citizenship is a social construction par excellence, albeit that citizenship concepts and practices are very much institutionalised and form part of the taken for granted of our common-sense paradigms of understanding. Moreover, theoretical approaches to citizenship have been dominated by political science and legal studies, which has tended to marginalise the idea of citizenship as a socially situated and relational practice. Maurice Blanc,⁵ who poses the field of citizenship as a site of irresolvable tensions and contestations, has noted, for example, the

⁵ In his contribution to the final report to the DG22 citizenship study, July 1997 (XXII/29/96).

paradox of the rising voice of the marginalised and excluded in claiming rights — including the right to difference. In other words, formal access to citizenship rights is not a precondition for the practice of active citizenship — and it may, indeed, be a consequence of that practice. Amongst sociologists, Heater's⁶ synthesising concept of multiple citizenship is therefore an attractive one: he joins identities and values with rights and responsibilities, and he also points to education as integral to the process of construction of citizenship amongst young people. The mainstream literature on citizenship has not, in fact, spent much time on social processes, nor on learning, with the exception of the development and analysis of civic/political education curricula in schools. Nor has it seriously considered young people's access to citizenship; but recent policy-related youth studies, particularly in the UK, has devoted quite considerable attention to the idea of young people's exclusion from full citizenship, in particular following the collapse of the youth labour market, reduced public expenditure, and the pruning of social benefit entitlements.⁷ Continental European analyses, on the other hand, have been more concerned with identities and values — less in the sense of pursuing the tracks of postmodernity, more in the sense of maintaining social cohesion.⁸ It seems to me that the uniting theme for youth researchers throughout Europe is that of participation: it both provides a communicative bridge into the mainstream literature on citizenship, and it also speaks to a core concern of educationalists of all kinds, above all, of course, to youth and community workers themselves.

This interest is anchored in the idea of participation as the key to the practice of active citizenship, and thus in the question of how best to inform and equip young people for that practice; it also places considerable importance on inequalities in access and opportunities for learning and practising the personal and social skills of active citizenship. Active participation presumes a foundation of knowledge about the worlds in which oneself and others live, about citizens' rights and obligations, about the chances and risks associated with pursuing particular plans and actions. It also presumes a foundation of self-knowledge and identity that lends the confidence to adopt standpoints vis-à-vis others whilst positively accepting that others may be different and think differently from oneself. To specify these prerequisites for the practice of active citizenship clarifies the centrality of education, and in particular experiential learning, to the process of becoming a citizen.

More broadly, this kind of perspective introduces the broader concept of social citizenship, which attempts to create a better conceptual balance between legal/political and social/cultural elements of individual and group rights and opportunities for participation and engagement. This concept has

⁶ D. Heater *Citizenship* London: Longman: 1990

⁷ G. Jones/C. Wallace *Youth, Family and Citizenship* Buckingham: OUP: 1992; B. Coles *Youth and Social Policy* London: UCL Press: 1995; J. Bynner/L. Chisholm/A. Furlong (eds) *Youth, Citizenship and Social Change* Aldershot: Avebury Press: 1997

become especially popular in youth studies, as a way to describe and understand the contradictory and ambiguous processes of contemporary transitions to full adulthood. Extended and fragmented youth transitions mean that cultural, economic, political and social routes to independence and autonomy are increasingly de-synchronised. This has led to the idea of access to citizenship as a process and as a continuum, so that individuals and groups in particular situations (such as unemployment) or at particular stages (such as higher education students) can be described as 'quasi-citizens'. This status becomes problematic when young people's progress along the continuum to citizenship is blocked or fractured. In turn, where young people feel they have little voice in the polity (their views are not taken into account, their needs are not met, etc.), it is likely that they will conclude they have little stake in their societies — with all the risks for democratic participation that this implies.

At the same time, European societies are multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, not only objectively but also, increasingly, subjectively; their populations are increasingly made up of citizens with quite diverse legal and political rights; and Europe's residents are increasingly mobile, if in different ways and for different reasons. These developments are a particular challenge for young Europeans, who find themselves facing opportunities and risks that older generations did not typically experience in the past. This brings, in turn, new challenges for learning for citizenship. The term 'learning' is used intentionally to convey an inclusive approach, relevant for formal and non-formal education processes, and in vocational training contexts as well as in general education. Preparation for active citizenship includes access to the skills and competencies young people will need for effective economic participation under the conditions of technological modernisation, economic globalisation, and, very concretely, transnational European labour markets. At the same time, the social and communicative competencies that are both part of new demands and which flow from changing work and study contexts are themselves of critical importance for living in culturally, ethnically and linguistically plural worlds. In this sense, such competencies are not simply desirable for some, they are essential for all⁹ — which reminds us, once more, of the gap between European ideals and realities.

In the meantime, my current conclusion is that we certainly need more systematic research into youth and citizenship in Europe if political debate and relevant policy agendas are to move forward constructively. However, I think we need something else still more: genuine theoretical advance which

⁸ For example, see: CYRCE (ed) *The Puzzle of Integration* Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter: 1995; *Agora: Débats/Jeunesses* Nos. 2/1995, 5/1996 and 12/1998 Paris: L'Harmattan; but also M. Vanadruel (éd.) *La vie associative et les jeunes en Europe* Strasbourg: Council of Europe: 1996

⁹ Howard Williamson, for instance, writes in his report for the DG22 citizenship study that "more difficult economic circumstances heighten the need to build the capacity of all individuals for effective life management and active participation — whatever their resources or position. Learning for citizenship therefore demands not just understanding, but the development of an operational competence." (p. ii)

can do justice to the scale and quality of social change we are currently undergoing in Europe.¹⁰ The argument for constructing a broader conceptualisation of citizenship still holds, but there is also a risk of losing its specificity in the process. As the comparative anthropologist Cathérine Neveu¹¹ has recently pointed out, citizenship cannot be reduced (or rather, extended) simply to mean sociability, but must retain a clear reference to political activities in the public sphere. The question is rather to ask what constitutes political activity, and how are young people motivated and empowered to participate in such activities, including their creation and renewal over time and space. Educationalists and youth workers may already have some of the answers to the second part of that question, but sociologists and political scientists still have a lot of work to do on the first part. Most importantly: who will be able to make the inspired theory-practice links?

¹⁰ See here W. Kymlicka/W. Norman "Return of the citizen: a survey of recent work on citizenship theory" *Ethics* 104/2, 1994: 352—381

¹¹ In an interview for *Agora: Débats/Jeunesses*, No.12/1998, p. 50