



## Young People and Active European Citizenship

European Youth Centre, Budapest

23<sup>rd</sup> -25<sup>th</sup> November, 2006

Saturday, 25th November 2006

Panel 4: Citizenship in educational (formal and non-formal) practice

### **Strengthening Opportunities for Citizenship Education on a local level: Examples from practice under difficult conditions**

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#### **I. The general situation in the municipality of Berlin-Neukölln**

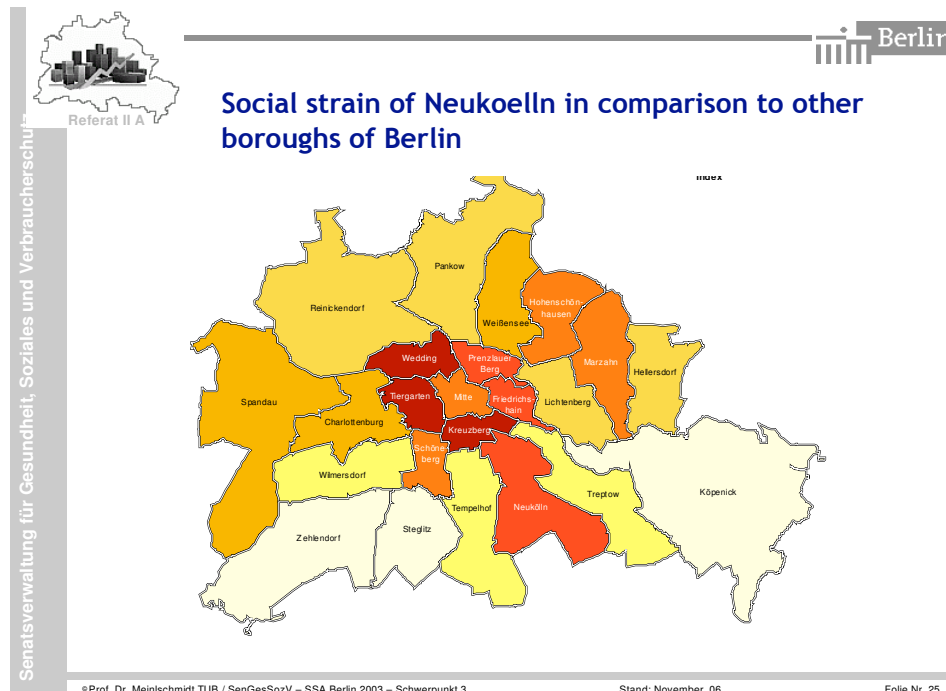
The analysis of ‘Opportunities for Citizenship Education on a local level’ has to be related to the general circumstances in a certain examined area in terms of social conditions and the consistency of society. These factors can also limit the opportunities for citizenship education.

The perspective of that paper is affected by the citizenship education work in a deprived area of the German capital Berlin. The Berlin borough of Neukölln is stamped by poverty, unemployment, a high percentage of migrants, an ongoing crisis of local economy and a lot of educationally marginalised groups. Some people call Neukölln “*The Bronx of Berlin - being full of violent youth gangs, pitbulls, antisocial nonworkers and mosques*”.

Neukölln is one of the largest boroughs of Berlin and one of the poorest regions in Germany with a very weak social infrastructure. On the other hand the borough has an international and multicultural character and a rich creative potential which appears valuable and colorful. Approximately 303.000 people live in Neukölln coming from 165 different nations. The quota of migrants is about 22 % (66.000 people). The largest proportion of people without German nationality lies in the age group between 6 and 18. Neukölln is the borough with the highest number of children and young people in Berlin - 54.000 of them live here. A huge number of young, often badly educated or non-skilled migrant young people are excluded from the regular labour market. They contrast with a number of quite well educated and socially secured older people living in the borough. There is a risk that the conflict of generations will intensify and lead to an ethnic conflict.



Neukölln has the biggest Turkish community in Berlin with about 27.000 people. There are several schools especially in the northern part of the borough where up to 98 % of the students have no German origin. 30 % of the adults do not have any graduation. Out of the migrants nearly 50 % finish school without a school leaving certificate. The unemployment rate in Neukölln ranges from 23,4 % at the average up to 38 % in the northern part with a high proportion of migrants and educationally marginalised groups. 88.300 people are depending on social welfare. 23,7 % of the Neukölln population fall into the category of poverty because they have to make ends meet with less than 730 Euro per month. Poverty and social segregation are also increasing by selective movement of people who are richer. They move to other, more socially balanced parts of the city. Hence it follows that the social gap between the excluded and the integrated citizens is multiplying.



These difficult general conditions have a very strong impact on the opportunities for citizenship education on a local level. They are a hard benchmark for promoting active (European) citizenship which is constantly in conflict with social, integrative and economic problems. There is doubtlessly a necessity for the strengthening of opportunities for citizenship education, but all good ideas and attempts have to be seen in relation to the chances of implementation in the given corporate, social, cultural and ethnic reality.

This paper shall make a contribution to the discussion about the promotion of active citizenship and participation in democratic life in relation to the European youth field and (its impact on) the larger society from a very practical, municipality orientated point of view.



## II. The main challenges for citizenship education in Berlin-Neukölln

*“Humans can be separated into three groups:  
The few who take care that something is happening,  
The many who observe what is happening,  
and the majority of people who haven’t any idea of what is happening at all.”*

*(Karl Weinhofer, born 1942, German politician)*

The main challenge for citizenship education is not the active and interested group, but the people who hardly know anything about the functioning of society or the opportunities to take part actively in the community. The social and educational background plays a very significant role for the active involvement in society. The majority of young people in Berlin-Neukölln has not the intellectual, social and material premises to be open for citizenship education. For that reason it is even more important to integrate the socially weak or uneducated people. Those have to be provided with special offers for citizenship education. Their value for the community has to be underlined to raise active citizenship.

However it can not be negated that there is a growing apathy among citizens, including the young, in terms of participation in society and politics. A huge majority of especially young people in Berlin-Neukölln is far away from active citizenship. This phenomenon is very much related to the fact that the existential questions of life such as the living of the family, vocational training and job opportunities or the acquirement of the German nationality have to be resolved first and then citizenship education can succeed.

Citizenship education has to contribute to the needs of the people who are supposed to participate. The sense of being active as one part of the community has to be cultivated. The education of citizenship needs to start with the strengthening of self-perception, the development of personality and self-confidence, the clarification of role models in terms of gender equality, the improvement of language, communication and emotional skills and the sensitisation for common values of society. Many young people in Berlin-Neukölln have serious deficits in their social competence and school performance. Migrants are torned between two cultures - the one of their country of origin and the one of the new homeland Germany. They have to find their own identity by bringing different cultural backgrounds and different expectations and prospects together. To accept and to tackle this difficult social, economical and also ethnic situation is a major challenge for the education of citizenship and for its sustainability on the local, regional, national and European level.



Derived from these remarks and the description of the current situation in Berlin-Neukölln I want to stress three theses for citizenship education on a local level as an intermediate result:

**THESE 1:** European active citizenship can only work if **basic existential conditions** of life are fulfilled. Opportunities for citizenship education are very much depending on the educational background and the social context young people live in. The reality of deprived areas has to be taken into consideration while thinking about active citizenship and within the conception of methods and instruments.

**THESE 2:** **Alternative forms** of citizenship education which start at a very basic, simple and concrete level and which focus on the day to day live problems of young people have to be employed to strengthen opportunities for active citizenship. To integrate all groups of society has to be the overall goal - not only to reach those who are active anyway.

**THESE 3:** Different actors who have access to young people have to be involved in citizenship education. Only a **network** of municipality workers, school teachers, people in youth organisations or institutions for social welfare and family assistance and last but not least the parents who have to be educated also themselves can bring forward citizenship education and the participation of young people in the life of the community.

### III. The opportunities to practice citizenship on a local level

In my professional function as an Officer for European and international affairs in the Mayor's Office of the Berlin-Neukölln City Council the promotion of *Active European Citizenship* plays a very significant role. There are different actors in the borough who are very important partners in the effort to support and practice citizenship. I want to point out some of them:

- *The Neukölln citizenship foundation* was initiated and is supported by personalities from economy, culture, politics, churches etc. as a platform for people who engage for and in their borough. The foundation aims at the participation of local people for the formation of their surroundings and for a joint and respectvoll cooperation. By involving the migrant communities the foundation wants to build up a new multiethnic community structure.



- The so called *Neighbourhood Management Offices* are community centers for the social urban development in socially disadvantaged areas of the borough. Citizenship engagement is voluntary and can not be planned. But the infrastructure to support active citizenship can be established by the local and regional authorities. In Neukölln this is also supported by the European Regional Development Fund. The overall goal of the Neighbourhood Management Offices is to offer assistance for self-help and to foster active neighbourly help and cohesion.
- The multicultural population of Neukölln is also multireligious. That means that different *churches, mosques, denominations, temples or chapels* are situated in the borough who have - especially in the islamic community - a very strong influence on young people. They have to be incorporated in citizenship education on a local level.
- The borough possesses a diverse *cultural scene* with many small initiatives, non-governmental organisations or associations. They are quite active in cultural and aesthetic education and can also transport the matters of citizenship education within their work.
- *Schools* are of course very important partners in citizenship education. Teachers have to be educated as multipliers for that issue and have to be supported to open up for new forms of internal and external cooperation.
- *Youth organisations and youth workers* have a direct contact to young people mainly in their leisure time. They also have to be supported in recognising their significant role for citizenship education.
- *Small and medium-sized enterprises* are more and more aware of 'ethnic economy' and feel obliged with the principles of corporate social responsibility. They have access to young people during the job orientation phase and the vocational training and can influence them in terms of citizenship education.
- The *organisations representing minorities and migrant organisations* have to be embraced in the efforts of citizenship education so that also the groups who are normally not receiving enough consideration are regarded and integrated.
- The *sports clubs* play a very important role in the life of a huge majority of children and young people. They have the opportunity not only to train people in sports but also in being active citizens.



#### IV. Examples from Practice

Despite the characterised social problems Berlin-Neukölln has to face, the borough is also the area with the highest proportion of people in Berlin who play an active role in social life and society. 40,2 % of the Neukölln citizens work on an honorary basis in order to improve the living conditions in their neighbourhood. Their engagement implicates that citizenship education represents a significant part of the formal and non-formal educational practice on a very local level.

Concrete projects have a particular relevance for the promotion of active European citizenship in the youth sector. As worked out before, projects for citizenship education have to start at a very basic and simple level and have to focus on the day to day live problems of young people. To support these projects financially the City Council of Berlin-Neukölln has - among other things - acquired funding from the European Social Fund.

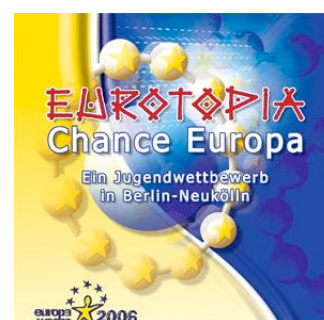
My work is to co-ordinate the conception and implementation of European funded projects to promote social inclusion, gender mainstreaming, professional integration and social and economic development. Small initiatives are supported by these funds who are supported in their efforts to make a contribution to overall European objectives like solidarity, growth, development and employment, transnational, multicultural cooperation and - citizenship education.

Apart from that it is important to promote awareness for citizenship education. This is done by different information campaigns, discussion panels, newsletter delivery services or specific proceedings.

##### Example 1: Youth Competition “Eurotopia - Chance Europe”

At the beginning of 2006 the City Council of Berlin-Neukölln tendered a youth competition with the motto “Eurotopia - Chance Europe - Show your thoughts and ideas for the future of Europe”. Young people at the age between 18 and 25 could show their creativity in designing pictures, photographs, short storys, poems, sculptures or other works of art concerning the following questions:

- What does Europe mean for yourself and your private and professional future?
- How Europe comes across your day to day life?
- Do you feel European?
- How do you see the future of Europe?





Different young people took part in the competition. Three of them had been nominated by a jury to win the first prize. They were granted a trip to the Austrian city of Graz to take part in an *International Youth Conference* to discuss the future of Europe in different policy fields and to make suggestions for the implementation of active European citizenship. The award ceremony took place during a panel discussion event with European politicians and representatives of European youth organisations in the Neukölln Townhall.

A special contribution for the competition was made by a school class of Berlin-Neukölln and impressed me a lot. They launched a story writing project by modernising the legend of the princess “Europe” and Zeus in the shape of Taurus who abducted her. The students adapted the myth of “Europe” to their day to day life in Neukölln and tried to find a reference to their own reality. The story book was accompanied by the following letter:

*“Dear Mrs. Süllke,*

*‘Eurotopia in Neukölln’ is our try to see Neukölln in an utopian way referring to the old legend of “Europe”. But the reality in Neukölln is sometimes so heavy and it burdens our feet while we are dreaming.*

*That is why in our stories people are kidnapped - like Zeus did it as a bad example. The Taurus becomes the Neukölln pitbull and we meet people we would not see as likable contemporaries if we met them in the evening on the streets, in the underground or in the corridor. It also can happen that someone dies.*

*Of course we hope that one day Neukölln is a better place and that we will live in a new Europe we are also talking about in our stories: Everybody gets along with each other, everybody can breathe fresh air and everybody can walk around freely and satisfied with whom and where ever he or she wants to go. But until then the politicians and us - we have a lot of things to do ...”*

The young story writers visited me in the Neukölln Town-Hall and we discussed about their future in Europe and their opportunities to take an active part in European society.





## Example 2: RÜTLI - Wear

In the northern part of Neukölln the “Rütli School” is situated. It is a secondary school with a migrant proportion of about 83,2 %. Students with different cultural backgrounds, weak language skills and school performances and very rigorous gender role models have to interact with each other provoking very often an unrespectful, violent and aggressive atmosphere. The situation escalated in March 2006. Teachers of the school wrote an emergency letter to the Berlin Ministry of Education because they were not able to get a grip on the situation anymore and to offer regular school lessons. They called for the closure of their school to found another form of education. The media reacted with a big campaign with headlines like “RÜTLI - source of terror - a school full of hate and violence”. A new director was introduced in the school and a lot of external organisations and initiatives offered help to normalise school life again. One of these initiatives - a group of young students - launched the project “RÜTLI - Wear” to improve the image of the school and the pupils again. The idea was that young people design their own logos and labels and print them on T-Shirts or other textiles. The pupils learned different things in the area of design, textile techniques, working with different materials and marketing. Additionally they gained computer skills and could qualify for their vocational training. All products of the project are sold in an online shop now ([www.ruetli-wear.de](http://www.ruetli-wear.de)) which was created by the young people themselves for the benefit of the school. One label was selected as the official “school-shirt” after a school competition. People who want to show their solidarity with the Rütli - School can by a T-shirt and wear it publicly. The project participants used the opportunity of playing an active role in a creative process for their surroundings and to really make a change for the future of their school. The project was financed by the European Social Fund.





### Example 3: The Green-Map - Project

The so called „Green-Map System“ is a globally networked, universally applicable system for the coverage of all ecological and cultural features of a certain urban environment. The objective is to create a printed ecological map of a district in town. The project idea came originally from New York - today Green-Maps have already been created with the same standardised symbol system in more than 50 countries worldwide. The German Green-Map co-ordinator, a professional geographer, offered to implement a project with students from Berlin-Neukölln in a district called “Köllnische Heide”.

The challenge of the project was that young people create a printed map of their surroundings by networking the infrastructural, social, cultural, economic and ecological factors of the marked-off area. This joint project work in discovering and compiling the specialties of the district had a very strong impact on the awareness for the community and the perception of the living environment by the students. They also used the project experiences for the improvement of their IT-knowledge, their job orientation and the development of their own future perspective.

The printed Green-Map as the result of the project addresses interested people who want to find special places in the neighbourhood like social and cultural facilities, nice landscapes, hiking trails, bike paths, places with a historic relevance, alternative housing projects, urban development or environmentally protected areas. The Green-Map has a real added value for other citizens in the neighbourhood and beyond that it is an important contribution for the young people to identify with their living environment. The integration of the map in an existing world wide system opens up opportunities for the participants to get in contact with other young people in Europe and the wider world.

The project was financed by the European Social Fund.





## V. Conclusions for the future

Strengthening opportunities for citizenship education on a local level is not an easy task to fulfill - especially under difficult social, ethnic and economic circumstances. It can only be brought forward by the joint action of many different partners working for the overall goal to improve active citizenship and the cohesion in the community. The exemplified best practices can only give a small insight into diverse local initiatives in Berlin-Neukölln to enhance citizenship education.

As an outcome of the previous explanations and remarks the following three conclusions shall be drawn:

### *CONCLUSION 1:*

It is necessary to provide a good general, cultural and emotional formal and non-formal education as a precondition for citizenship education. The respect of reality and the acceptance of the fact that there are a lot of young people who can not or who do not want to be active citizens is important. From that point of view all measures for citizenship education have to start adapting to the needs and abilities of the target group.

### *CONCLUSION 2:*

By means of concrete projects which have a direct impact on the diverse life concepts of young people or which are related to common problems and worries of young people awareness for active citizenship can be set up indirectly. It is very important that young people get the opportunity to be involved in the development and the design of their surroundings. By giving their creative energy they start to identify with their living area and thus they are sensitised to become active citizens.

### *CONCLUSION 3:*

All relevant actors in the community have to be involved in the development process of citizenship education. The role of the City Council respectively the municipality is to moderate the process of interaction and cooperation between neighbourhood management offices, religious communities, cultural organisations, schools, youth organisations, minority organisations, sports clubs and the local economy.

Moreover there is a significant need to raise a new communication policy to address civil society. Awareness raising campaigns have to be started to reach a general interest and concern on the issue of citizenship education for young people in a community based but also European orientated perspective.