



Education for dissent. Travelling Towards Active European Citizenship



We need to open our eyes to the structural difference of ideas and interests, of power and institutions, of problems and solutions that manifest themselves inside the European Union. But how to do this? Christine Landfried offers a method: "The politicisation of the European Union", she writes, "should be used to open up nation states for difference, in order to enable its citizens and political elites to approach others and the other". A key feature of this process is diversity. The European Union, by its very nature, is a place of incredible diversity. A wealth of nations, identities, languages, cultures, and histories, all participating towards the same common objectives. Furthermore, European citizenship provides a vehicle to unlock and use the creative potential that rests in Europe's diversity.

But where is the appropriate place for integrating and exercising diversity in European citizenship? Does the legal concept that provides European citizens with a set of passive and active rights suffice? From a functionalist point of view the multi-levelled European polity does already integrate subsidiarity to an impressive degree, further improvements notwithstanding. The surplus of Europe in this respect is the supply of additional instruments for conflict resolution for both governments (via cooperation) and individual citizens (via judicial proceedings) when compared to the national sphere.

Nevertheless, there is something missing even in sophisticated and well-meaning qualitative models of European governance: the citizens as actors in their own right. They are conceptualized as contributors and defenders of a political system they have not created themselves. The individual access to this political system is limited to "policy networks" - as Fritz Scharpf defines them - which are only open to professionals, politicians, and activists. Citizens are members of a community imagined by the political elites alone. In the European Union a citizen is a stillbirth - when one sees the lights of meaningful participation, one has already crossed the line towards professionalism of politicians and experts, lobbyists or co-opted activists. In a self-regulatory society the individual is expected to be informed about the political process, yet at the same time passive in its construction. The gap between these two roles is to be bridged by public relations and communication officers.

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The problem is that in contemporary consumer societies, with their mass media, the European level cannot compensate for the loss of politicisation and mobilisation on the national level any more. European citizenship isn't a substitute for the socio-cultural milieu of the past. It doesn't need to be. A precondition for Europeanised identities is to open up spaces where individuals can realize European experience by active European citizenship. In this respect parliamentarism is no satisfying solution. Active European citizenship is only possible in the era - and area - of post-parliamentarism. Parliament(s) should figure as the foundation(s) of the Union, with the commission, the member states and citizens shaping and taking possession of the different rooms of our European house in their own right. Citizens of Europe will appear while defending their personal integrity against the "European" identities, interests, and ideologies ascribed to them by the elites. Nationality is a specific source of diversity. As national individuals we may have a European passport. As European citizens we need national citizenship. The solidarity arising among us across borders will be the first sign for emerging active European citizenship.

Active European citizenship is therefore not only the integration of legal citizenship rights, but also the appropriation of a personal role in a European reality. To reinstall the limited and exclusionist legal setting of nation states on the European level does not suffice. It is the individual that counts; when it appears in order to act with others whom s/he considers equally interested and interesting. Someone who claims a transgression in orientation, a perspective beyond the national centres; who, for this specific moment in time, leaves the political behind. Such a position is grounded in the firm belief that cooperative action opens up a social space in which people can meet free of secondary attributions (like national identities). This social space opens up ways for individuals to fuse their creative potentials. Its basic rule is strict self-representation. It provides what politics can never create universally on the basis of community: unconditional trust and recognition. And in this way, this apolitical form of creativity reflects the much broader ideals of the European Union: a common project constructed from a multitude of individual perspectives.

Education has an important part to play in this concept. In order to adhere to active European citizenship, one needs responsibility, respect, and passion. Education, whether formal or informal, can contribute by nurturing and supporting personalities who show steadiness and steadfastness in their methods of critique which account for permanent self-development; who never lose their playful curiosity in the world and their honest interest in others; who display the nerve to take a position and face a challenge. Education needs to bring the message across that the one who dissents consciously is the one who takes responsibility. It is not enough to provide and acquire internationally accredited degrees that give young people opportunities to work abroad. Our challenge is called living Europe.

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