

Strengthening opportunities for citizenship education on a local level: a case from Berlin-Neukölln

Franziska Süllke

Introduction – How to make citizenship education effective under difficult conditions?

Poverty, unemployment, a high percentage of migrants, an ongoing crisis of the local economy and a lot of educationally marginalized groups stamp the Berlin borough of Neukölln. Peter Wensierski (1997), editorial journalist of the German magazine “DER SPIEGEL”, called Neukölln “*The Bronx of Berlin - being full of violent youth gangs, pitbulls, antisocial non-workers and mosques*”. The conglomerate of interacting attributes like many foreigners, a high crime rate, a high unemployment rate, many welfare recipients, ethnic conflicts, neglect, a lack of education and language skills, social downfall and the degeneration into a slum were culminated into the head note ‘End of the line – Neukölln’.

How can citizenship education work effective under such difficult conditions?

How can these challenging parameters be reversed into democratic and social cohesion?

The head of a youth organisation in Berlin-Neukölln puts it in the following way: *„It is essential to bundle the resources of young people, their energy and creativity, and to encourage them for more participation, activity and a realistic self-esteem by developing strengths and overcoming weaknesses.“* And a school teacher sums it up like this: *“By an individual assistance which is meant as help for self-help we can give our young people the chance to build up their trust in their own abilities and their solidarity with others to start a better future.”* (Bezirksamt Neukölln 2006).

This research shall make a contribution to the discussion about challenges and opportunities of education for active citizenship and participation on a local level under difficult conditions in relation to the concepts of European citizenship education from a very practical, municipality orientated point of view. Concepts underlying citizenship education, as used by the Council of Europe and the European Commission, are considered in terms of their relevance and practicability in the rather difficult context of Berlin-Neukölln, which is characterised by segregation and exclusion.

The article outlines three main challenges according to the overall topic:

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 and the gap between concepts and practice have to be regarded while thinking about methods and instruments for citizenship education.

Under very hard conditions conventional forms of citizenship activation might be not applicable. For that reason alternative forms should be taken into consideration. The overall goal has to be the integration of all groups of the society, not only to reach those who are active anyway.

Given that education for citizenship and even more education for *European* citizenship is a difficult task only the use of combined resources can reach the target. Different actors who have access to young people have to be involved into citizenship education. A network of these actors including the families has to work together to foster the participation of young people in the community life.

The perspective of this article is affected by the citizenship education work in a deprived area of the German capital Berlin. Opportunities and constraints of citizenship education and the encouragement of an active European citizenship under difficult social conditions are analysed.

Concepts of European citizenship education – great expectations in Brussels and Strasbourg appearing at the local level

Education for democratic citizenship became a common goal of education policies in Europe in the late 1990s. Both the Council of Europe and the European Commission have developed concepts for European citizenship education through their policies and programmes.

The Council of Europe

From the Council of Europe's point of view (2007) education for democratic citizenship focuses on the following goals: *participation, partnership, social cohesion, mutual understanding, access, equity, accountability and solidarity.*

In the Council of Europe's perspective human rights are the precondition for active citizenship. The Council of Europe (2005) underlines that democratic citizenship is not limited to the citizen's legal status and to the voting right this status implies, but it includes all aspects of life in a democratic society.

This is a very important aspect for the local policy in a large city like Berlin-Neukölln because it also affects questions of migration, integration, the intercultural dialogue and the participation beyond different ethnic backgrounds.

The Council of Europe (2007a) defines 'Education for Democratic Citizenship' as "*a set of practices and activities designed to help young people and adults to play an active part in democratic life and exercise their rights and responsibilities in society.*" The Council declares that 'Education for Democratic Citizenship' "*encompasses other related concepts, such as peace and intercultural education.*" The human rights education is seen as the core and an indivisible part of education for

democratic citizenship. This becomes apparent especially in terms of gender role models and political attitudes in different ethnic communities on the local level. There is an enormous need for conveying values of gender equality, democracy and the fulfilment of human rights.

Directed to the promotion of a culture of democracy and human rights the Council of Europe considers education for democratic citizenship as a process of lifelong learning, aimed at all individuals, regardless of their age or role in society going far beyond the school environment. The lack of education is one of the hugest problems in deprived areas like Berlin-Neukölln. For that reason priority has to be given to this issue on the local level.

The European Commission

Since the 1990s the European Commission's policy action is targeted at bringing Europe closer to its citizens. This is a great challenge in practice, because many citizens have hardly any idea what Europe means to them.

The European Commission (2007b) regards training and youth offers as useful vehicles for the promotion of active participation in Europe's diversity of cultures, economies, politics and societies. Out of that the Commission places lifelong learning at the centre of an integrated approach to offer all European citizens opportunities for acceding to knowledge. Education and training are key elements of the citizen's activation policy on the local level too. However, offers are not always enough, because it is difficult to reach educationally marginalised groups. In several cases the target group cannot be convinced that education and training are useful for them without having any future perspective for employment. Methods have to be found to support people in taking part in education and training programmes to improve their chances for employment. In order to reach that the European Commission promotes several programmes in the fields of youth, culture, media, employment and civic participation. The European Commission (2007a) also runs the "Europe for Citizens" programme to promote active citizens' participation, understanding and solidarity between European countries and a European identity.

It is very often the case that the approach of these programmes does not fit into the concepts and capabilities of the people on the local level, because it is too complex and vague, not focussing on their existential problems like unemployment, poverty or ethnic conflicts. In terms of that the task of local policy is to bridge the gap between the overall European objectives and the premises of the local people.

Regarding the concepts and definitions for European citizenship education elaborated by the Council of Europe and the European Commission it can be reasoned that the Council of Europe represents a stronger orientation of citizenship education towards human rights and democratic participation while the European Commission focuses more on training, lifelong learning and the development of a European identity. The impacts and applicability of these policies on the local level will be analysed in

the following sections by taking the Berlin borough of Neukölln as an example, where the social context constitutes a very special challenge to the elucidated concepts.

The difficult case of the Berlin borough of Neukölln

Socio-economic realities of Neukölln's neighbourhood and their impact on citizenship

Neukölln is one of the largest boroughs of Berlin and one of the poorest regions in Germany with a very weak social infrastructure. Approximately 303.000 people live in Neukölln coming from about 165 different nations. The quota of migrants is 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 live here. A huge number of young, often badly educated or non-skilled migrant young people are excluded from the regular labour market. Neukölln has the biggest Turkish community in Berlin with about 27.000 people. There are several schools 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 people fall into the category of poverty as measured by the average of the population (Bezirksamt Neukölln 2007d).

Poverty and social segregation are also increasing by selective movement of people who are richer. Hence it follows that the social gap between the excluded and the integrated citizens is multiplying.

These difficult general conditions mark the *'hard case' Neukölln* and have a very strong impact on the opportunities for citizenship but also for citizenship education on a local level. They are a hard benchmark for promoting active European citizenship, which is constantly in conflict with social, educational, 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.

The key challenges for citizenship education

*“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 have not the intellectual, social and material premises to be open for citizenship education. The Council of Europe's perception that participation depends on the willingness and capacity of individuals to engage with each other can be strongly confirmed from the local viewpoint. 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. 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 their school performance. Migrants are torn 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.

There are some basic requirements, which have to be fulfilled as a precondition for active citizenship. Derek Heater (1990) illustrates that in his book *"Citizenship; the civic ideal in world history, politics and Education"* as the so-called 'cube of citizenship'. The first dimension of this cube is the synthesis of 5 basic elements of citizenship: legal and civil, political and social aspects, civics education and identity aspects. The second dimension of the cube is the geographical context within citizenship can be integrated: the local, the regional, the national, the continental and the global context. The third dimension of the cube is the educational one. This dimension implies the objective to educate the citizen at three levels: the cognitive level – knowledge about the public affairs of the political community, the attitudes (affective) related to civics and the technical competencies (pragmatic) linked to political participation.

According to that the degree and the realisation of active citizenship is depending on citizenship education in different ways. Without citizenship education citizens will not be able to participate

actively in political life. Another very important element of the educational dimension is the intercultural education. It can strengthen citizenship by showing the possibilities to live together beyond the different cultural, ethnic and religious differences.

Opportunities for citizenship education on a local level under difficult conditions can be derived from these dimensions. Active citizenship depends very much on the first dimension – the availability of basic elements like legal and civil status, political knowledge, social security and cultural identification.

A huge majority of especially young people in Berlin-Neukölln are far away from active citizenship. This 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 are not clarified. The capability and willingness to take an active part in democratic life and to exercise rights and responsibilities in society is strongly connected to the degree of social and legal recognition. To accept and to tackle the difficult social, economic and also ethnic problems of a ‘hard case’ area is a major challenge for citizenship education and its sustainability on the local, regional, national and European level.

Three key challenges to citizenship education on a local level emerge from this:

Challenge 1: European active citizenship can only work if **basic existential conditions** of life are fulfilled or have a perspective to be 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 the conception of methods and instruments for citizenship education.

Challenge 2: **Alternative forms** of citizenship education, which start at a very basic, **simple and concrete** level and which focus on the day-to-day life 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. Nevertheless it is also important to empower the already powerful and to train the trainers in order to multiply the issue of citizenship education.

Challenge 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 of course the parents (who have to be educated themselves) can bring forward citizenship education and the participation of young people in the life of the community.

The key partners to implement citizenship education

Citizenship education has to proceed within the social neighbourhood focussing on very concrete action plans and projects which directly affect the different target groups who are involved in the decision making and budget allocating process (Senatsverwaltung Berlin 2004). There is a variety of committed partners in Berlin-Neukölln who play a crucial role in the effort to support and practice citizenship education on a local level. They can be separated in two groups: the partners of the organised civil society and the partners of the formal and non-formal youth education.

The partners of the organised civil society are for instance the so called *Neighbourhood Management Offices* that function since 1999 as community centres to foster a social urban development; the *Neukölln citizenship foundation* as a platform for people who engage for and in their borough (Bürgerstiftung Neukölln 2007) and a diverse cultural scene with the association '*Cultural Network Neukölln*' supporting the employment of artists from different ethnic communities (Kulturnetzwerk Neukölln 2007). Moreover the different religious communities, particularly the Islamic community, have a very strong influence on young people. They have to be incorporated in citizenship education on the local level to reach political and social integration (Bezirksamt Neukölln 2007a). Apart from that *small and medium-sized enterprises* are more and more aware of citizenship education 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. Self-employed people with non-German origin, called the 'ethnic economy', likewise play a major role for citizenship education of young people through training and employment (Kresta 2006).

The partners of formal and non-formal youth education are of course the schools where the teachers have to work as multipliers for that issue and to test new forms of internal and external cooperation. Many schools already open up for external project executing organisations or for non-governmental organisations that offer additional non-formal education or vocational orientation to the students. But also *youth organisations and youth workers* and *sport organisations* play an important role for promoting and cultivating citizenship education (Jugendamt Neukölln 2007). Beyond these the *families* have a significant influence on the formation of their children. That is why it is very important to involve them at a very early stage in the process of formal and non-formal citizenship education.

Citizenship education is very much connected to a diversified approach including the partnership between a wide range of stakeholders, practitioners, formal and non-formal educational institutions and the local public administration.

The following examples of good practice in section IV focus on the strengthening of education for European citizenship, intercultural citizenship and ecological and social citizenship.

Citizenship education in practice

Despite the characterised social problems Berlin-Neukölln has to face, 40,2 % of the Neukölln citizens work on a voluntary basis in order to improve the living conditions in their neighbourhood. Their engagement implicates that citizenship education represents a significant influencing factor on a very local level.

Concrete projects have a particular relevance for the promotion of active European citizenship especially in the youth sector. To support these projects financially the City Council of Berlin-Neukölln acquires financing from the European Social Fund.

Small institutions and non-governmental organisations are supported in their efforts to make a contribution to overall European objectives and also the development of European citizenship and a sense of European identity.

Different initiatives also work on themes of social inclusion, gender mainstreaming, professional integration, social and economic development – and of course European citizenship education.

This article wants to point out three of these initiatives identified as examples of good practice by a committee for project evaluation in the City Council of Berlin-Neukölln. Some of the parameters for good practice are the following:

- Continuous involvement of participants and positive feedback by the target group;
- Gender-mainstreaming;
- Compliance with success indicators set in advance;
- Achievement of examinations / certificates;
- Contribution to a democratic and tolerant citizenship education;
- High publicity;
- Sustainable development;
- Networking activities.

An essential factor for success of these projects is their orientation to the local situation and to the needs and abilities of their target group with a rather low-level concept and an accompanying psychological support.

Example 1: Educating young people to become dance trainers

"Streetdance is my life. It gave me so much – friendship, fun, motivation – and a real job perspective.", tells the 16-year old Fidan. *„Yes, I already earn a good pocket money und later I can turn my passion - dancing into a professional career. There is no better way of working."*, adds the 17-years old Isaac.

The basic idea of this project is to educate 20 young people from migration background to become dance trainers in different styles of streetdance. Both theoretical and practical matters as well as

pedagogic competences are delivered. The target is an accredited dance trainer certificate, which enables these young people to work as generally accepted dance trainers. By means of that young people with problematic future perspectives get the chance to qualify themselves according to their interests and capabilities and to open up new vocational opportunities. The project leader explains the project concept in the following way: *“There is an enormous demand for streetdance, but there are no qualified dance trainers. Education projects for this street culture have only been initiated in the USA, Great Britain and France so far. The motivation for this project was to activate young people by giving them a real future perspective.”*

The young people can work in different youth clubs as dance trainers and some of them finance their final secondary-school examinations by that. Furthermore they improve their social and communicative competences. In an atmosphere, which is affected by the philosophy of HipHop the project participants learn on the one hand a democratic and tolerant behaviour as a precondition for citizenship and on the other hand they teach other young people how to understand each other.

Implications:

This project refers to the basic elements of citizenship like social security and identification. The most important premise for active citizenship is a future perspective with education and employment. The answer is to show young people how to develop themselves and how to integrate in society according to their interests and capabilities. The approach of training the trainers works very well in this project and can be one way to reach young active citizenship. The first challenge for citizenship education described in section III of this article is illustrated by this example. European active citizenship can only work if basic existential conditions of life are fulfilled or have a perspective to be fulfilled. Opportunities for citizenship education are very much depending on the educational background and the social context young people live in.

Example 2: RÜTLI-Wear-Schoolproject

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 very often provoking a disrespectful, 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 out of control 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 is that young people design their own logos and labels and print them on T-Shirts or other textiles. The pupils gain knowledge about design, textile techniques, working with different materials and marketing. Additionally they get computer

skills and can qualify for their vocational training. All products of the project are sold in an online shop, which was created by the young people themselves for the benefit of the school. A school company was founded to provide practical work placements and apprenticeship training positions for students of the school.

Implications:

This project applies alternative and creative forms of education for active citizenship. By means of a very concrete and personal medium like a fashion style it becomes easy for the participants to identify with common values created by themselves. 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. Also this initiative provides new perspectives for the personal and professional development of these young people.

The combination between technical, creative and social competences during the project implementation is a very useful tool. The second challenge for citizenship education described in section III of that article is illustrated by this example. Alternative forms of citizenship education, which start at a very simple and concrete level, have to be employed to strengthen opportunities for active citizenship.

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 deprived area.

The challenge of the project was that young people create a printed map of their surroundings by networking the infrastructure, social, cultural, economic and ecological factors of the marked-off area. This joint project work in discovering and compiling the specialities 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. To design the Green-Map the young people got help from different actors in the district, the school teachers, the neighbourhood management office, the non-governmental organisations, the youth centres and the small and medium-sized enterprises. 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.

Implications:

The third challenge for citizenship education also described in section III of that article is illustrated by this example. Different actors for citizenship education have to combine their activities and to work together to succeed. Young people have to be encouraged to join this network. They have to be supported in network activities in order to use synergies for a multiplied effect.

For some of the project participants it was the first time that they actively realised their neighbourhood in order to design their Greenmap. They got in contact with the relevant actors in the area and their awareness for the structures of the community raised. They got to know the interaction and cooperation between neighbourhood management offices, religious communities, schools, youth organisations, cultural organisations, minority organisations etc. This cognition opened up the opportunity to make a step inside the community and to become an active citizen.

Conclusions, perspectives and policy implications

Strengthening opportunities for citizenship education on a local level is not an easy task to fulfil - 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.

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

First of all, the respect of reality and the acceptance of the fact that there are a lot of (young) people who cannot or who do not (yet) want to be active citizens is important. It is necessary to provide a good general, cultural and emotional formal and non-formal education as a precondition for citizenship education. All measures have to consider the needs and abilities of the target group. It is very important to find out what are the interests, desires, capacities and objectives of young people to build a bridge to the overall concepts of European citizenship education promoted by the Council of Europe and the European Commission.

In its glossary of terms for education for democratic citizenship the Council of Europe (2003) introduces the term 'participation' as defining the quality of citizenship education. The Council admits that participation depends on the willingness and capacity of individuals to engage with each other, but also to engage across communities and between individuals and the institutions that exist. This gives reason to justify that in the understanding of the Council of Europe citizenship education is closely connected with offering opportunities for participation, as it is about developing the skills of participation and the reduction of obstacles to participation. The first good practice example relates to that. Participation is the first step to strengthen opportunities for citizenship education on a local level.

Secondly, 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, worries or values awareness for active

citizenship can be increased. Alternative forms of citizenship education have to be employed to integrate all groups of the society. That implicates that on the one hand the potential of young people has to be supported and developed and on the other hand weaknesses have to be balanced. The second good practice example shows that in a very concrete project which appeals to the creativeness of the individual and the team spirit of group a real change can be realised which has a good impact for a whole area.

Thirdly, 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. This can be seen in the third good practice project.

Perspectives and policy implications

Recapitulating the opportunities and constraints of citizenship education under difficult social conditions it can be reasoned that there is a huge variety of opportunities to improve the education for active citizenship even in a 'hard case' area.

However there is a gap between the concepts of the Council of Europe or the European Commission and the feasible work in practice. On the local actor's side there is a lack of promoting awareness for citizenship education by different instruments.

The European concepts of citizenship education can work in the context of a 'hard case' if they are transformed to concrete and target group orientated measures. Policies and programmes of the Council of Europe and the European Commission have to bear in mind the reality of the people on the local level assuring that the basic elements of citizenship (legal status, political knowledge, social security, education and cultural diversity) are considered as influencing factors for active citizenship.

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. This can only succeed by a joined action of all relevant stakeholders, officials and practitioners and of course by the young people themselves. For that reason the Council of Europe and the European Commission should share the task of citizenship education with as many as possible actors and multipliers to enlarge the network of partners in this matter.

Goals like *participation, partnership, social cohesion, mutual understanding, access, equity, accountability and solidarity* have to be communicated in an understandable and applicable way so that concrete initiatives and projects can be created out of them.

The democratic culture has to start in day to day live by developing the skills and by offering concrete and manageable opportunities for participation.

The sense of European identity for mutual understanding between European citizens has to start with the identification and active participation on the local level combined with a feeling of belonging to the community.

Taking into account that all the exemplified methods and instruments can work well under 'hard case' conditions it is predictable that in a context with better socio-economic premises the implementation of the elaborated attempts could be even more effective. Applying them could really make a change for strengthening opportunities for citizenship education on a local level in the future prospect of Europe.