

COYOTE THEME

Mind-bending on European Citizenship

based upon the outcome of chat sessions and mail exchanges between Anca Butuca, Sladjana Rakonjac, Silvia Volpi, Giulio 'Mac' Maistrelli, Zilvinas Gailius, Annette Mütter, Mario D'Agostino

Dear colleague, imagine you're attending a long term "Advanced Training for Trainers in Europe" funded by the two most important European Institutions. Now imagine that one of the issues of such a training is "European Citizenship", and that when you're called upon to confront yourselves and your colleagues about this, you look at each other with much perplexity about the sense of such a reflection...

If you've imagined this in a lively way, you might have come close to seeing what happened in January 2002 in Strasbourg, when the first seminar of the AITE took place and where the authors of this article have been challenged by the request to compose an article on further developments of our doubts and questions.

So, before your very eyes here's the result of an experiment: the first Coyote article ever written through the distant cooperation among seven people (seven trainers), who have chatted and mailed over the Internet for some months, exchanging ideas, feelings, impressions. We know that the result might be far away from perfection, but we're proud to say that the content truly reflects the different opinions we had and – above all – we hope it will grab your attention and provoke your reactions!

BULLS, SHEEP AND THE EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP.

Maybe some of you have heard about Bull&Sheep Bingo. Bull&Sheep Bingo is a grid of 5x5 cells, each of them filled with one expression which is commonly used within meetings (e.g.: "strategy", "holistic approach", "integration", "best practice", etc...). To play, you are supposed to attentively listen to colleagues during meetings and cross off one expression in the grid as soon as it has been said. When you get 5 crosses in a line you're supposed to stand up and shout "Bull&Sheep! Bull&Sheep!". (There are indeed versions of this game which are less polite and can easily be found on the internet.)

Talking with a colleague, we had the idea of using Bull&Sheep Bingo as a real tool within trainings. Properly modified and with slightly different instructions, **Bull&Sheep Bingo could be used for stimulating trainees to re-consider the meaning of certain expressions.** Especially those which have ended up constituting the "jargon" of European youth work and that - in some cases - have progressively lost

their sense along the way. One of the expressions that might be included in this "tool" is **European Citizenship.**

However, it's not only trainees who might need a bit of reflection about the expressions they use, and this article is in fact about the work that a group of trainers did in the desperate attempt to answer the question: "How to get ready for a training course on European Citizenship?". **A work that at the end of the days turned into a quest for the real meaning of the expression "European Citizenship",** as if we would have it crossed on our grids...

Two statements from our first meeting can well summarise our initial feelings: "It's difficult to get fully prepared for something that's not fully understood even by the organisations sponsoring it!!" said one trainer. "I see this European Citizenship as the empty bottle designed by the institutions, which we are trying to fill with values" said another one.

So the quest for the sense began with these questions:

- ▶ "What the concept of European Citizenship is for?"
- ▶ "What is the added value of speaking of European Citizenship instead of – for example – active citizenship or global citizenship? Which alternative set of thoughts can we achieve using this particular concept?"
- ▶ And finally the utmost doubt: "Does talking about European Citizenship make sense?"

So the brave group of trainers jump into the discussion...

by Giulio 'Mac' Maistrelli



| | | | | |
|----------------------|----------------|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Networking | strategy | Integration | Best practice | Pro-active |
| Geographical Balance | New methods | European Level | Innovative actions | Empowerment |
| Additional value | Globalisation | Sense of ownership | Gender issue | Added value |
| Effectiveness | Participation | White Paper | Holistic approach | High Quality |
| Consensus | Youth Policies | Conceptual framework | Plan of action | Learning by Doing |



WHAT THE CONCEPT OF EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP IS FOR

A possible answer to "what European Citizenship is for" is that identifying and defining a kind of citizenship which can be defined as European, would support the process of the construction of Europe, of strengthening a European Identity. Yet, another relevant point is that European Citizenship could be used as a leading concept **for stimulating and supporting the life of the civil society** in Europe, probably being a bridge between concepts such as active participation and the concept of citizenship itself. To say it simpler: the ultimate scope of European Citizenship would be **to secure certain values and praxis to the foundations of the European existence.**

Nevertheless, the direct experience of some of us is that such "institutional slogans" sometimes turn to give a false image about how the reality is. One trainer of our group put it down in a really clear way: "Almost all of the participants coming from Eastern Europe had the image that European Citizenship is wonderful, fantastic and also magic. Their will to be 'included' in an exclusive Eldorado Country was really very strong. I think that, if it is our job to define and put values in this bottle it is also our responsibility **to open the discussions about the limits and potential of European Citizenship**".

Being quite satisfied about the outcome of the discussion so far, the trainers (maybe a bit less brave than before) went further in their investigation on the "specificity and added value" of European Citizenship...

...and got stuck nearly immediately!

IS THERE ANY SPECIFICITY IN THE CONCEPT OF EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP?

How it is possible to define the specificity of something which is vague in itself? What is – in fact – Europe? It's the European Union? The Council of Europe? Another set of nations? A geographical unit whose borders do not overlap national ones? Something not related at all with geography?

What we do intend by Europe is not an irrelevant question in this case, since – depending on the answer – it might happen that we will have to find a common specificity (*therefore something which is only referable to Europe*) between Oviedo, Vladivostok, Narvik and Valletta, for example. Still, according to the answer to the first question the specificity should consist of values and praxis.

DOES TALKING ABOUT EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP MAKE SENSE?

So the big question came in naturally: "Does talking about European Citizenship make sense?". But at this point very little of our original braveness was left and our minds simply

fragmented in a storm of doubts, such as:

► People make use of their citizenship mostly on a local level (the personal commitment for making the park behind your home safer, the participation in citizens' assemblies...) or on a global one (buying fair trade products, recycling materials...). **Does a level of active citizenship exist which is specifically "European"?**

► We could also contemplate that the word "European" in this case has a connotative meaning (for example: "European Citizenship" is the citizenship which bridges political, economic and social aspects of the life of the citizen towards an extensive and diversified participation of the individuals in the civil society of the community where they live).

In this case – however – we would find quite unfair (if not neo-colonialist) the appropriation by Europeans of values and praxis for which people have struggled and fought all over the globe, sometimes at the cost of their lives. If we cannot find a common specificity in European Citizenship, but we take a set of values also common to other places on this planet and we define them as "European", **won't the concept of European Citizenship become exclusive (in the meaning that it excludes), rather than inclusive?**

► The question could be taken the other way around saying that European Citizenship defines the sense of belonging to Europe intended as a Community of Europeans, but in this case new questions arise:

- ✓ would it make sense to speak about a **Community of Europeans**?
- ✓ would European Citizenship foster **the sense of belonging** to "Europe" / would a "European Citizen" define her/himself as "European"?
- ✓ would European Citizenship guarantee to everybody **basic rights and freedom** of movement within the community?
- ✓ would European Citizenship define or imply the **responsibilities** that individuals have towards the community?
- A final question arose in the discussion: what is the interaction between European Citizenship and other citizenships which could overlap? For example: what about if the European Citizenship give me certain rights which are not given to me by my national citizenship?

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP IN TRAINING ACTIVITIES

For the brave group of trainers it would have been enough to blow its mind on these questions, but the team of the ATTE training course were much more demanding than just asking for such reflections on the theme. In fact the original request to us was to write an article on "how to get ready for a training course on European Citizenship" - and this was during a simulation game during which we had to both write the article and cope with the demands of two other "populations" towards ours...

So we also made some time during our internet discussions for a general round of ideas about practise. We came up with a list of 'recommendations' which we present here below. We're totally aware that they are far from being a ready-to-use tool for shaping a programme for a Training Course on European Citizenship, but we hope they might raise some doubts and consequently considerations in teams preparing for such a training.

► If there is a context in which the concept of European Citizenship might be of some use, that is probably within intra-European activities, as it seems to be pretty related to the internal functioning of the "European Community" more than to the way the community relates to non-Europeans. But the contrary is also true: as the work on European Citizenship can easily turn into a self-celebration of the "Europeans", an **attentive and critical participation from "non-European" participants** can really give a boost to the discussions.

► We've doubts about the expression "Training Course on European Citizenship": this title can understate the idea that European Citizenship is a defined concept to be acquired and used afterwards. We believe than an alternative expression such as "Training Course through European Citizenship" would stress the fact that European Citizenship is a **dynamic concept in evolution** and that mind bending on it is a **powerful tool for critical reflection** on the theme of Citizenship in Europe.

► We experienced quite some frustration in spending a lot of time and energy in the attempt to define a concept that, in the end, we couldn't concretely use, as we found it empty of any specific meaning. Assuming that this could also happen to other groups of people, you might prefer to provide your participants with a wider mandate, such as: "which kind of citizenship for the contemporary world?". However this consideration is really based on the feelings we experienced during our debate: maybe your group of trainees would cope with the theme "European Citizenship" in a less frustrating way!

► If it is true that it's frustrating to use a concept and discover its limits, it might also be relevant in a training to allow trainees to recognise these limits and **not to take for granted that the concept of European Citizenship is fantastic and "natural"**. European Citizenship is one of those expressions quickly becoming youth trainer jargon... maybe a little bit more of critical thinking is just what we need around here!

► As far as we pushed our investigation on the sense of European Citizenship, we think that European Citizenship should:

- ✓ be dynamic (in a permanent state of transformation)
- ✓ be permanently analysed and verified
- ✓ be flexible enough to allow people to interpret it in different ways
- ✓ include an intercultural dimension
- ✓ implement different scales of citizenship (local, regional,

national, global...)

- ✓ include the ethics of responsibility
- ✓ derive from each one's personal experiences
- ✓ have concrete, practical aspects, which can be implemented by your trainees in their regular activities
- ✓ be value based
- Last but not the least, if you're brave enough to implement a training using the tool of European Citizenship, be ready to:
 - ✓ Answer a lot of questions
 - ✓ Work with a lot of uncertainty
 - ✓ Be extremely flexible
 - ✓ Cope with the fact that European Citizenship will probably highlight much more the diversities among your participants than the similarities
 - ✓ Face big conflicts

So, we come to the very end of this article. It has been challenging for us all to achieve the goal of producing a written text out of our free and unstructured debates. If you might have found the article contradictory at times, that's because the feeling of contradictions was spread all along the process which brought us to type the lines you're reading now... We spent time and energy in thinking about a concept we didn't like and we spent afterwards even more time and energy to state our dislike in written form... You see? It's contradictory itself! What about you? You can easily check out if the virus of European Citizenship has attacked you: if you feel you spent time and energy in reading an article you didn't like, you're badly ill!

...or maybe you just read the article this far as a test ground for the Bull&Sheep Bingo??!

Seriously though, **the authors want to stress that they would be extremely glad to receive your reactions/comments/remarks to this article**, and your opinion on the concept of European Citizenship...

Contact address:
mac@nkoni.org

