

Crossing Borders and Bridging Gaps

An Editorial on Civic and Economic Education in Europe



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A crucial goal of the Online Journal for Social Sciences and their Didactics is to promote, support and stimulate the European discourse between scholars and teacher trainers who are committed to the field of civic and economic education. Through this number, which has national reports on civic education and on economic education as its main topic, the Online Journal starts a series of such reports. Of course, the editors welcome further submissions of papers on these issues.

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Contents

[*Isolated national discourses, isolated disciplines*](#)

[*Shared topics, problems, and contents*](#)

[*Reports on Civic and Economic Education in Europe*](#)

[*Relevant Topics for Future European Discourses*](#)

Isolated national discourses, isolated disciplines

It seems to me that communication and cooperation of scholars and teacher trainers in the field of the social sciences' didactics in Europe are not yet as common, regular and intensive as desirable. There exist some initiatives which try to disseminate information and to intensify contacts, for example, the *politeia* Network for Citizenship and Democracy in Europe or the Association of European Economics Education ([AEEE](#)). But to build a broad, integrative and stable kind of network there is still a lot of things to be done.

From my point of view there are two borders to be opened and to be crossed: the border between the rather isolated national discourses, institutions and practices of social sciences' didactics and the border between the disciplinary fields of political science and sociology on the one side and economics on the other side. Thus, the *Online Journal of Social Sciences and their Didactics* is dedicated to build bridges over the national and over the disciplinary gap. One type of bridging are issues of European interest with papers from authors of all European countries. A second type of bridging are special national reports which give a short overview over the national situation of civic or economic education for readers from abroad. In 2003 the journal will start a third type of bridging, the international correspondent, who will report from time to time about the discourse in her country by describing important new topics, publications and congresses.

To broaden the access to the journal an additional printed edition will appear quarterly under the title *Journal of Social Sciences and their Didactics* from 2003 on. It is produced by the [Wochenschau-Verlag, Schwalbach/Taunus, Germany](#).

Shared topics, problems, and contents

It is obvious that the different national disciplines - didactics of civic education and didactics of economic education – actually share most of their topics, questions, problems, paradigms, methods and research results. This can be easily illustrated, for example: aims of civic and economic education; human rights education; ideas of a democratic school culture; gender issues; principles of constructing curricula; teaching and learning methods; methods of evaluation; didactical reduction of complexity; political and economic socialisation of children and young people; heterogeneity, pluralism and controversy in the classroom; regional, national, European or transnational identity ("we" and "them"); dealing with "dark" aspects of the national history; relation between national and international topics, between the national and other points of view; development of the faculty of judgement concerning political and economic problems; and so on. *The Online / Journal of Social Sciences and their Didactics* offers an appropriate European forum for the discussion on these and other issues.

It is also clear that the different national politics of civic education and of economic education have a lot of common problems and solutions. To give some examples: political and administrative traditions of civic and/or economic education and their major changes; civic or economic education as principle of education or as an independent subject; shaping and organising the disciplinary area of subjects (e.g. Geography/Economics, Politics/History, Social Studies); institutions and forms of a democratic school and learning culture; contents, size, and structure of curricula; centralisation, decentralisation, and autonomy in civic and economic education; the kind and influence of admitted textbooks and other media; teacher training institutions and programmes; and so on. This journal stimulates an European discussion on these topics, too.

Without any doubt scholars, teacher trainers, politicians and managers in civic education and economic education – and of course teachers themselves – must know what is going on in their European neighbouring countries. This is, not at least, true for the level of teaching and learning contents. There are a lot of shared believes, topics, problems, institutions and solutions in this field which are in fact shared contents and issues of civic education or economic education. For example: human rights, Christian shaped values, democracy, market system, tax policy, solidarity, unemployment, ethnicity and minorities, demographic crisis, welfare state system, nation, family, European market, European monetary union, European constitution. The processes of European integration and of internationalisation or globalisation create a fast and continuously growing set of common contents for civic and economic education.

But there is no natural co-evolution of Europeanising and internationalising economic, political and social worlds and the appearance of European institutions for communication and cooperation in the field of social sciences' didactics. This is the main reason why the editors are committed to the *Online / Journal of Social Sciences and their Didactics*: to establish a durable and reliable frame for European and transatlantic information, communication, and cooperation which may help to cross the national and disciplinary borders and which is open to all scholars and teacher trainers in this fields. The openness of this journal is neither restricted by paradigms, approaches or issues, nor by methods. The only restriction of access is the grade of excellence realised by the submitted papers which is controlled by a system of anonymous referees.

Reports on Civic and Economic Education in Europe

In this edition of the *Online Journal* the editors present articles on civic education in France, and on civic and economic education in Germany and Greece. Beside the main topic, Klaus Koopmann describes the "Project Active Citizens".

The reader should remember that the *Online Journal* has already published three national reports on Austria and England. In number 1-2002 you can find Peter Filzmaier's contribution *Civic Education in Austria* which is complemented by *Wirtschaftliche und politische Bildung in österreichischen Schulen* (Economic and Civic Education at Schools in Austria) of Christian Sitte. The same edition contains the paper *Principals or Agents? Developing Citizenship through Business, Economics and Financial Education* of Peter Davies which refers to the situation in England.

In his contribution *Civic Education in the French School* – which is published in French only – François Audigier analyses the renaissance of civic education as an obligatory subject in primary and secondary schools. He gives a short description of the history of civic education in France and its official programmes and compares the programmatic level with the every day level of teaching and thinking about teaching this subject. His main focus are the different actors in this field and their behaviour. His article stresses the difference between the administration of the education system which relies strongly on producing programmes and the teachers who often ignore them. Primary school teachers, for example, never refer to these programmes and concentrate instead on every day life in the classroom, the learning of the rules for correct behaviour in the school community, e.g. respect and tolerance. For Audigier the main reason for this problem is teacher training which doesn't imply any systematic formation in the civic education issue. The author discusses several tensions: (1) the tension between the general aim of education to autonomy and the way schools are managed with only poor possibilities for participation, (2) the tension between "three modes of presence" of civic education: as a clearly identified subject Civic Education, as a very broad diffusion of issues and knowledge ("questions of the world") and as an interdisciplinary responsibility for all teachers of the school, and (3) the tension between the desire for harmony and the culture of conflict.

As a complement to the area covered by Audigier's article Nicole Tutiaux-Guillon discusses in *Civic, Legal, and Social Education in French Secondary School – Questions about a New Subject* the introduction of civic education as a compulsory subject and its consequences. She refers to the results of her own empirical research and she also uses an approach which focuses on the different concepts and practices of civic education used by different groups of actors ("worlds"), educational politics management (political, social and legal world, short: institution), teachers (school world), and students (young world). Following Tutiaux-Guillon, the main references of these groups are for the institution political debates, for the students common sense debates which are mostly not political, and for the teachers a traditional notion of "school knowledge" as well as an experience of growing social tensions and problems in school. The author finds a broad gap between the aims that the introduction of the new subject should realise and the reality in the classroom. From her point of view Civic, Legal, and Social Education failed in bringing the three worlds of institution, school and youth together failed because of to different interpretations and practices, but she concedes that it may be too early to find a clear result.

Concerning Germany we have two contributions which allow us to get an impression of the educational situation in the field of social sciences. In her article *Economic Education in Germany* Birgit Weber describes the rather confused and mostly precarious situation of this subject in the German Länder school system. Recently there was an open debate under the heading of "more economics in the classroom!" and a broad call for economics as an own subject in all compulsory schools. Weber analyses the approach of pre-vocational studies in lower secondary schools (e.g. "Arbeitslehre") and compares it with the concept of economic education as a part of social studies. She presents the different types of teacher training for this subject and the resulting problems. The didactic discussion of economic education in Germany mainly refers to three approaches: preparing pupils for typical economic living-situations, economic education as learning of economic concepts, categories and/or methods, and self-directed, self-controlled learning of economics. On balance Weber insists that economic education in Germany has to be improved on the levels of didactic approaches and research, of educational politics and on the classroom level as well.

Christa Händle deals in *The Burden of History – Civic Education at German schools* with the historical outline of this school subject and its consequences for the recent situation. She shortly describes what the four different political systems in Germany meant for civic education. Händle analyses the situation in respect of four "forms of civic education": school life, teaching principle, independent subject, and extra-curricular education. As major problems of civic education today Händle identifies political apathy and resignation on the one hand, the problematic aspects of knowledge and attitudes of German juveniles in comparison to other countries on the other. She blames the selective German school system and the half-day schools and asks for an integrative school system.

Two further papers refer to the situation of civic and economic education in the Greek and Greek shaped part of south-east Europe.

Despina Makridou-Bousiou and Stavros Tsopoglou present a paper *Economic Education in Greece on the High School Level*. They give a short history of the Greek school system and criticise the high grade of centralism, the self-isolation of the educational discourse and the blockade of innovations by interest groups. Recently economic education became more important when a compulsory course in economics for all students in the upper high school was introduced. In addition some optional courses are offered. In the Greek Gymnasium economic contents are integrated in courses of technology, geography and home economics. Makridou-Bousiou and Tsopoglou blame the dominance of encyclopaedic knowledge and memorising at cost of understanding and thinking in teaching and learning economics. From their point of view only the first step of a necessary educational reform has been taken up to now.

Gitsa Kontogiannopoulou-Polydorides, Maria Ntelikou, Georgia Papadopoulou and Bessy Tsakmaki analyse *Greek Conceptions of Democracy, Citizenship, the State Role, and Immigrants* and focus their contribution on an empirical research of textbook contents and students' conceptualisations. The textbook presents the established western consent on civic education contents. On the one hand this means a deep change against former textbook orientations which focused on national history, religion and traditional culture. On the other hand the textbook mixes up the western world model with these previous Greek orientations when it illustrates the model with Greek institutions and organisation of social life. The authors take this phenomenon as a unique and creative cultural appropriation

which allows the co-existence of traditional and modern elements. Students' attitudes reflect a rather similar strategy of coping with the tension between the traditional and the modern "imported" institutions and conceptions. For example their appropriation of the new concept is to alternate the active role of a citizen in a modern democracy with the traditional Greek model of a citizen as a patriot committed to her nation and to national unity, supporting her country without reservation. Furthermore, students stick to the concept of a powerful state which exists to serve them, a rather clientelist pattern. This corresponds to the predominance of the conservative-patriotic model of citizenship among students.

Last but not least, *F. Klaus Koopmann* proposes in his article *Experiential Civic Learning by Using "Projekt Aktive Buerger"* the concept of citizens as acting subjects as a means to support and sustain a humane and democratic society and to stop forms of de-civilisation. For him action as experiential participatory learning by coping with authentic political and social problems and processes is paramount. Koopmann describes and promotes the didactic principles of subject-orientation, action-orientation, problem-orientation, authenticity and policy-orientation. His German "Projekt Aktive Buerger" is an adaptation of the American "We-the-People - Project Citizen". The core idea is that students work on a public problem in their community aiming at developing a solution and a plan of action for its implementation which they present and reflect in the classroom and in political institutions or public administration.

Relevant Topics for Future European Discourses

Let me make some concluding remarks which may be only rather subjective or accepted by other scholars. Which of the presented issues seem to be interesting and relevant for further research and discussion in the European context of social sciences' didactics?

First, from a methodological point of view, several papers show that an actor and institution orientated approach of research on civic and economic education opens a wide field of national and comparative work. This approach can refer to institutional and cultural theory and it takes into account the different cultures of thinking and acting ("worlds"), the active interpretation, shaping and appropriation of changes in the educational system by the different types of actors.

Second, from an institutional point of view, we have to discuss the problem that there could be a severe contradiction between the model of a self-determined, active citizen – what is promoted as a crucial aim of civic and economic education – on the one hand and the poor possibilities and little chances pupils and students have to participate in the decision making in the school and in the classroom. Education for autonomy and democracy doesn't match autocratically or hierarchically ruled schools very well.

Third, from the perspective of main problems in our field, the articles reveal some shared and urgent issues for the didactics of social sciences. I would like to emphasise the following seven problems and issues:

(a) Differences and differentiation

Teaching and learning in the political and economic field in view of the growing differences and tensions between different local, regional, ethnic and national identities and cultures, notions of citizenship, politics, and institutions within each country or nation.

(b) Multilevel differences and differentiation

Teaching and learning in view of the tension between these identities, cultures, notions, and institutions and a growing Europeanisation and internationalisation regarding these topics.

(c) Different and dominant models of citizenship

Teaching and learning regarding the tension between the different national models of political and economic citizenship and of economic and civic education in Europe and the tension between each of those or all of them and the dominant American – and European? – model which is promoted all over the world.

(d) Students' choice of their own model of citizenship and participation

The challenge for economic and civic education to deal with a pluralistic range of different models of economic and political citizenship which offers the opportunity of an individual decision of students for the model they prefer (see the paper of Peter Davies in the Online Journal no. 1-2002).

These four tendencies together may result in the necessity to apply or invent new forms of teaching and learning in economic and civic education which help students to cope with ambiguity, pluralism, heterogeneity, controversy and the inevitable compulsion to find their own way and identity in a rather diverse cosmos of different worlds.

(e) Self-sufficiency of national education cultures

The menace of path-dependence and immovability of national civic and economic education systems and cultures which may hinder the chance of learning from abroad because of the historically evolved, specific national, narrow and closed perspective on educational institutions, learning cultures, subjects and contents. To overcome this is one of the main tasks of European social sciences' didactics.

(f) Concepts of European citizenship

The challenge for economic and civic education to contribute to the evolution, discussion and diffusion of concepts of European citizenship which are appropriate to meet the standards of civic and economic education of self-determined citizens in pluralistic democracies.

(g) Blind spots and dark spaces

A special challenge for the didactics of social sciences is to find and realise appropriate forms of teaching and learning concerning the blind spots and dark spaces of the actual political situation or recent national history. To give some examples: modern forms of slave trade, Mafia controlled markets, corruption and unscrupulous enrichment, legal pollution, crime of police, military and secret services, discrimination and persecution of minorities, civil war, dictatorship, military aggression, genocide. It is a common problem of civic and economic education to deal with these urgent but in the classroom mostly hidden issues in all nations – of course with different contents, forms, dimensions of blame and victims. This problem has not been very well appreciated and analysed yet and remains unsolved so far.

Of course, the reader is invited to find out more crucial topics or to reject the above listed issues as not very pressing in view of the concrete educational situation she has to cope with. The editors will appreciate if these reflections result in an article or a letter to the editors of the Online / Journal for Social Sciences and their Didactics.

KeyWords: Economic education, civic education, didactic of social sciences, European discourse, European communication, European cooperation, isolation of disciplines, isolation of national discourses, interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, national report, European identity, European citizenship, national politics of education, teacher training, France, Germany, Greece, active citizen, institutional approach, students' participation, process of differentiation, Europeanisation, models of citizenship, students' choice, national self-sufficiency, blind political spots, dark historical spaces



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